

THE BLUE STREAK
and
Doctor Medusa

By
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THE BLUE STREAK

and Doctor Medusa

CHAPTER ONE

TROUBLE AHEAD

John Marigold leaned back in his chair and tipped an expensive cigar toward the ceiling. Through a haze of smoke he regarded the young man seated across the library table from him. The young man returned Marigold's scrutiny with steady eyes.

"I am told you are a superdetective called the Blue Streak. I hire none but the very best." Marigold leaned forward a little, assuming a questioning attitude as he spoke.

The Blue Streak smiled. He was tall, with a square jaw and steel-blue eyes. His one hundred and eighty pounds of solid bone and muscle fitted snugly into a suit made up of a leather jacket and a pair of red trousers. The trousers were made like a wrestler's tights, and had a blue stripe running down the outside of each leg. He wore a leather helmet with a blue stripe from front to back. A red

mask covered the upper part of his face.

"I am not a detective," he said in a slow drawl. "Detectives catch criminals. I *destroy* them."

"You don't have to wear that mask in my library." Marigold was curious about the famed Blue Streak. He wasn't sure he would be able to recognize the young man without his helmet and mask.

"The way I look and the way I work are my own affair," the Blue Streak answered crisply. "Tell me your trouble and I'll tell you whether or not I'll help you."

"You're mighty independent," Marigold said with a frown. "I'm sure Bess is headed for trouble. I've hired two detectives and they found nothing to report, so I want you to take over."

"You want me to act as bodyguard for Bess?" The Blue Streak started to get to his feet. "That is out of my line."

Marigold waved him back to his chair. "Wait a minute. I haven't told you what I fear."

The Blue Streak waited while Marigold explained his reason for worrying about Bess Marigold, his niece.

"A month ago I turned my niece's fortune over to her. I was her guardian until she reached her eighteenth birthday, when, according to the terms of my brother's will, she received a fortune. I suspect a clever gang of criminals of plotting to get

it away from her."

"You know these criminals?" the Blue Streak asked.

"No, I don't even know who to suspect, but Bess told me she was investing in a secret business. As a lawyer, and until very recently her guardian, I asked her to let me check on the business. She refused to tell me with whom she was dealing." Marigold scowled. "To me that means the business is crooked and that somebody is after her money."

The Blue Streak got to his feet. "I don't fancy she'll lose all of her fortune. If she loses some of it, it may teach her a lesson. I get the idea she is a spoiled child who *needs* a lesson. Sorry I can't help you, Mr. Marigold."

"I'll pay you a fee of ten thousand dollars. All you have to do is to find out with whom she is doing business, and what is their game. Just keep an eye on her and see that she doesn't get hurt."

Marigold got to his feet, his heavy face creased with a frown of annoyance. He wasn't used to having any man refuse to do what he wished.

"No," the Blue Streak said gruffly. "My services are not for sale."

Marigold snorted. "Every man has his price," he snapped. "Name your fee."

"Good day, Mr. Marigold," said the Blue Streak as he turned to the door.

The door swung open just as he reached out to grasp the knob, and a young woman with blond curls and wide gray eyes almost rushed into his arms. She was dressed in a smart riding habit and carried a silver-mounted quirt of Western design. There was about her an imperious air, accentuated by her haughty manner into an almost regal attitude. Her eyes flashed with arrogance as they encountered those of the Blue Streak.

"Sorry," the Blue Streak murmured as he stepped aside.

"What do you mean by moving about this house like a cat?" the girl snapped. She half lifted her quirt. "I suppose you're another policeman hired to annoy me. If you are, you can get out of here and stay out!"

The Blue Streak chuckled. "Sorry, Miss Bess," he said in his soft drawl. "You happen to be wrong. I'm not the least bit interested in what happens to you."

"Nothing is going to happen to me, my good man," Bess said mockingly. "Please go out by the servants' door."

"Young lady, you had best listen to someone with brains," Marigold almost shouted.

Worried beyond measure by his niece's headstrong disregard of his wishes and advice, John Marigold was finding it increasingly difficult to

handle the young lady with tact and diplomacy. Since all his best efforts along those lines had resulted in total failure, he had taken to blustering angrily. However, this method was proving even less effective than his earlier and surely wiser procedure.

"Remember your blood pressure, Uncle John," Bess said sweetly. "Dr. Medusa said you were not to shout."

At that moment the Blue Streak's retreat was blocked by the entrance of a tall man dressed in immaculate riding clothes. He stared at the Blue Streak, and his small black eyes narrowed a little. One hand lifted and touched his carefully waxed and pointed mustache.

"Am I intruding?" he asked, looking at Bess.

"Come in, Count Luggar, this is just a friendly family row."

Marigold had crossed the room. He glared stonily as Count Luggar bowed to him. Bess caught the count's hand and led him on through the library. As the door closed, Marigold turned to the Blue Streak.

"You see? If that bird isn't a crook, I'm a Jap," he cried.

"You should be able to check up," the Blue Streak said, and grinned. He was inclined to agree with the old man. He had taken an instant dislike

to Count Luggar.

"I have checked up on him, and he's a count right enough. He's well known in social circles." Marigold grunted and bit off the end of a fresh cigar with unnecessary vigor.

"I have not changed my mind about helping you, but if I do so I'll call you. By the way, how long has Dr. Medusa been your personal doctor?" asked the Blue Streak.

"Two years, and he's a good one, highest priced in the field."

Marigold lighted his cigar.

"Where's he from?"

Marigold laughed. "He's from Vienna and has a gilt-edged record. He showed me his papers and I checked on him myself. You talk just like all the detectives I've had in here."

The Blue Streak went out through a side door into a beautiful garden. Deep shadows of evening were settling around the shrubbery and laying a black line along a high stone wall. He grinned as he moved noiselessly down a gravel path which ran through the well-kept grounds surrounding the Marigold estate. His thoughts definitely amused him.

"Spoiled brat and a cranky and bossy old uncle," he said to himself. "No place for me."

His low-slung speedster was parked outside the

wall, so the Blue Streak headed straight for the small gate leading to the street. His keen senses were alert as always to sounds and movements and smells.

Suddenly he halted just inside the gate and stood listening.

What he heard did not take sharp ears. A pistol barked from the shadow of a hedge and orange flame licked out toward him. The Blue Streak bent forward just a little as he felt the impact of a lead slug against the breast of his bullet-proof vest. The force of the bullet was so great as to shake him. That meant the caliber was heavy.

Ducking his head, he lunged for the hedge. His charge carried him through it and out upon the gravel beach of a small lake. He saw no one, but heard footsteps running toward the house. Halting, the Blue Streak stood and listened. He could follow his assailant and enter the house, but he did not move. It was not his way to trap hirelings or gunmen. He always struck at the top.

Returning to the gate, he walked to his car. As he slid under the wheel, he saw a piece of paper wrapped around the steering wheel. Though it was almost dark, the Blue Streak read the scrawled message. One of his extraordinary powers was a pair of eyes so keen they saw at night, like the eyes of a panther.

Keep away from the Marigolds or you will be blown to bits. You may fool some people but you are just a big bluff to the KILLER.

The Blue Streak grinned happily and whistled a soft cowboy tune as he drove down the street. He pulled up at the first corner drugstore and called the Marigold estate. Getting Mr. Marigold on the line, he told the lawyer he would handle the case. He finished with a warning.

"Remember, I do not work in the usual way. Don't try to get in touch with me. If I have anything to report I'll get in touch with you." He hung up before Marigold could answer.

An hour later a handsome young man sat in a fashionable night club eating a thick steak. He ate slowly, and as he ate he watched a gay party at another table. He recognized Bess Marigold and Count Luggar. With them were two couples. A foreign-looking man of perhaps fifty, who said very little but seemed to be the center of the conversation, was apparently in command of the table. The girl at his right, a pretty redhead, was clearly very fond of him. The other couple did not interest the Blue Streak. They were ordinary rich young people out for a good time.

Bess Marigold cast several glances toward the

Blue Streak and lowered her lashes flirtatiously. She did not recognize him except as a wealthy and attractive young man. Count Luggar noticed her glances and grew irritated. Finally he pulled her to her feet and led her to the dance floor. The Blue Streak finished his steak.

"Hardly worth while wasting time on her, but if she's important enough to a gang of criminals to make them shoot at me, I guess I can spare a little time on her," he said as he got to his feet.

CHAPTER TWO

THE KILLER'S CLAN

Dr. Medusa left the dinner party at the night club early. As he bowed over Bess's hand, a faint fragrance of heliotrope perfume arose. Straightening, he spoke to her gravely, his black eyes stabbing into hers.

"I will see you when I call upon your uncle tomorrow. Until then, good night."

Bess had an odd feeling as his eyes moved over her. It was as though the doctor were seeing a statue in cold marble.

Count Luggar slipped his hand beneath her arm.

"Time for another dance," he said softly.

Bess forgot the strangeness of the doctor's glance, and the shiver of fear which had passed through her a moment before.

Dr. Medusa moved away from the table alone. The redheaded girl watched him go, a pout on her red lips.

Outside the club he waved aside two taxicabs and stepped into a black sedan which slid up to the curb. The rear curtains of the sedan were drawn, and when the doctor entered he was engulfed in darkness.

The black sedan moved swiftly across town, keeping just under the speed limit and obeying all traffic rules. It pulled up before a brownstone house which was the home and office of Dr. Medusa. The car slid into a tunnel of vines after making a brief pause in the street. Its door opened, and a man emerged. He was of the same build as Dr. Medusa, but wore a heavy cloak and a military cap. The man strode up a short flight of steps leading to a door in the rear of the house, which he entered with a purposeful and proprietary stride.

He descended a flight of stairs to enter a dimly lighted basement which was littered with broken furniture, dust-covered household articles, and a typical assortment of discarded furnishings such as might be found in the basement of any very old house. Stepping to a torn and cobweb-covered screen, the man paused. His hand flicked out and a door behind the screen opened.

Dr. Medusa, dressed in military attire, stepped into a large, well-lighted room which was furnished with easy chairs, tables and two deep chesterfield sofas. Six people jumped to their feet as he entered. They stood silently, gazing at him in a sort of wondering awe.

"Be seated," Dr. Medusa said.

The three women and three men sat down, but no one spoke. Medusa seated himself behind a black-

topped table, set his cap at his right, locked his fingers before him, and smiled at a dapper little man dressed in evening clothes.

"You may report, Joe," he said in a voice any doctor might have used in speaking to a hospital attendant.

"Three bodies waiting, sir," Joe said.

"According to plan?"

"The plan never fails," Joe said.

His eyes lowered to a box of cigars on a stand beside him.

"You may smoke one cigar, Joe," Medusa said. "You may all relax and take one drink or one smoke, as you choose."

Joe lighted a cigar, the others all took drinks. Medusa watched them with a critical eye. Finally Joe spoke.

"When will Luggar and the redhead bring in the body of that Marigold dame?" he asked suspiciously.

"The Marigold dame, as you call her, happens to have five million dollars. We can use that money. When we have it, all of it, we will send her to the cavern to join the others."

Joe fingered his cigar nervously. Medusa said nothing further. Finally the dapper little man spoke again.

"Louie muffed the job on that superflatfoot.

Missed him at twenty feet." Joe stirred uneasily. "Louie never did that before."

Medusa laughed.

"Are you afraid of the Blue Streak, perhaps?" he asked sneeringly.

"He sure does some stunts I don't like, besides sheddin' bullets," Joe answered.

"You believe he really is a superman?" Medusa asked.

"He's busted up some mighty tough rackets with just his fists, so I hear," Joe said. He sounded a little doubtful.

"He has taken the job of running down the group doing business with Miss Marigold, and of protecting the girl." Medusa smiled at Joe's amazed surprise.

"We'll have to be mighty careful," the unhappy Joe muttered.

"You go right on working as usual. Deliver the bodies to the cavern. Tonight I am giving you names of three new men I wish out of the way. You will dispose of them before coming here next Saturday evening to report." He bent forward. "I will add a fourth, the body of this mighty fellow, the Blue Streak."

"Mighty risky business," the worried Joe muttered again.

"And if any one of you weakens, you'll be de-

livered to the cavern along with him." Medusa's black eyes stabbed from face to face. His clan of killers shrank back from that hard, unwavering stare.

"We won't slip up," Joe said hastily. "Will we?"

He turned to his gang. They shook their heads silently, eyes not moving from the face of their leader. Indeed, Dr. Medusa had commanded their fixed attention from the moment of his entrance into the room. He dominated them with the force of a particularly talented hypnotist. The few men and women in the group seemed almost immobile as they watched in fearful silence, transfixed in the presence of their ruthless leader. He seemed peculiarly gratified by their evident respect.

"I have an operation to perform, a very delicate major operation, one that is usually unsuccessful. This will be successful and the patient will live. I must hurry to the Mitchell General Hospital." Medusa put on his cap, made an about-face, and left the room through the secret door.

No one in the basement room spoke until they heard a motor start in the drive outside. Then, their repression gone, they all started to talk at once.

"What's he want to save a guy for when he pays us for bumping 'em off?" Louie, the gang's gunman, asked.

"He picks the guys he bumps off. He has to make

everyone believe he is the real Doc Medusa, like those stolen papers say," Joe said.

"He is a great surgeon," one of the girls said.

For a few moments the group sat in silence, apparently thinking about the unexplainable habits of the pseudo doctor for whom they worked, and who held the fate of so many within his power.

"Suppose after he gets all the statues he needs for that palace of his, he takes an idea we'd add class to the collection? He does make the ones he gets into statues, don't he?" Slim Bead, who posed as an insurance salesman, spoke slowly, his eyes on Joe's face.

"Don't ever say a thing like that again, or you'll wind up in the palace quick," Joe snapped. He looked around the room fearfully.

"Think he is listening?" Slim asked in a low voice.

"He always knows everything that's said," one of the girls broke in. "Me, I'm not even thinking of such a thing."

"I'll quit thinkin' that way, too, when he knocks off this Blue Streak," Slim said.

The other members of the gang stared at Slim but said nothing. Their fear of Dr. Medusa was greater than their fear of the Blue Streak. Slim got to his feet and moved confidently toward the secret door.

"See you all tomorrow," he said.

Joe walked to the door and stepped outside. He watched Slim start up the broken cellar steps, swinging along with his shoulders hunched over. As his foot hit the top step he hesitated, then his arms went up and Joe heard a sudden groan. Slim slumped and fell forward on his face. The hall lights snapped off, plunging the space above in darkness.

Joe stood still, beads of sweat breaking out on his forehead.

Suddenly the lights came on again, and he saw that Slim's body had vanished. Joe turned and entered the basement room again. The others stared at him, fear in their eyes, and stark terror showed in their faces.

"Slim's on his way to the cavern," he said as he reached for a fresh cigar.

Four pairs of eyes stared at him but not a mouth was opened. The killers knew they were being watched and checked upon by others of Dr. Medusa's underground ring. Each of them wished desperately he or she could get away, but no one moved.

Joe smoked his cigar to a stump. He tossed the frayed stub aside and got to his feet with an air of decision.

"Time to turn in," he said.

Without looking at his companions, he left the

basement.

The four remaining killers sat listening until they heard the side door open and close, then they too got up and left the room.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HUNT STARTS

The Blue Streak's need for money was not great. Most of the folks he helped had no money to pay a fee. His father had left him a small sum, with instructions in his will that his son use the money to help others. The superdetective lived in a small cottage well out of the city, where he had a workshop, a garage for his speedy car and a landing strip for his light plane.

The morning after the meeting with Mr. Marigold, the Blue Streak strolled out to the shop beside the hangar. Hank O'Toole, his mechanic and general handy man, was tinkering with the plane's carburetor. His homely face lighted up as he saw the Blue Streak walking slowly across the field toward him.

"Mornin', sir," he called.

"Hello, Hank. Got her going?" asked the Blue Streak with a smile.

"She'll be slick as an eel soon as I put her back together," Hank said. He eyed the Blue Streak's outfit. When the boss dressed that way there was excitement in the air, and Hank loved excitement. "But I can do the fixin' later if you want me to

go with you."

He grinned eagerly.

Hank both loved and admired his young employer, and any opportunity to accompany him was seized upon at once by the genial Irishman. Indeed, the Blue Streak often suspected Hank of maneuvering to be in on things, when the superdetective had not planned on his assistance, and was even a bit surprised to find Hank at his side!

"Won't need you today, Hank. Later, perhaps." The Blue Streak bent over the parts scattered on the bench. "I may give you a ring. Have the plane in shape."

"Shore will," Hank said. "Got a job you're going to start on?"

"Just a bit of poking about," the Blue Streak said. "I'm driving out to the Marigold estate and see what I can find."

He walked into the garage and started his speedster. As he swung the car into the highway he opened up a bit, because somehow he felt uneasy and had a hunch that he should hurry. Pulling in at the Marigold grounds, he walked through the side gate and up to the back door. His ring was answered by a sad-faced butler.

"Could I see Mr. Marigold, Stafford?" he asked the servant.

Stafford frowned and cleared his throat. "He isn't

home, sir. I can't say where he went. He must have been called away on very urgent business to leave as he did in the middle of the night. He left no word."

"Is Miss Bess Marigold here?" the Blue Streak asked.

"Miss Bess is week-ending at the mountain place of Count Luggar." Stafford hesitated. "I'm a bit worried about Mr. Marigold, sir. It's not like him to leave without speaking to me. I always pack a bag for him, sir."

"Could I see his study?" The Blue Streak spoke quickly.

"Come this way, sir." Stafford seemed eager to have the Blue Streak's advice about his absent employer.

Entering the library, the Blue Streak walked to the big table where Mr. Marigold worked. Several letters lay on the desk. A cigar, smoked down only about an inch, lay in the ashtray as though suddenly thrust there. The Blue Streak bent forward. He sniffed gently, picked up the cigar and looked at it. It was broken, as though Marigold had suddenly gripped it hard. The Blue Streak stooped to examine two dark stains which were visible on the rug beside the desk. He studied them intently for a few minutes.

"Blood," he said softly.

"Blood," Stafford echoed. "Oh, sir, this is surely terrible!"

"It may not be serious, but I think you had better call the police, Stafford. Don't mention my having been here. I'll do some scouting myself." He turned abruptly toward the door.

Stafford followed the Blue Streak. "You don't really think he has been, ah, murdered, do you, sir?" he asked nervously.

"No, Stafford, but we have to find him or they may do away with him. Can you tell me where Count Leggar's mountain resort is located?" the Blue Streak asked.

"You take highway ten north until you come to the Overlook road into Skeleton Mountains. That is as near as I can say, sir." Stafford rubbed his hands together nervously. "I do hope you find him, sir."

"Call the police, Stafford, and do it now," the Blue Streak said as he walked swiftly out the door.

The Blue Streak turned toward his car. He started the motor and headed back toward home. This did not take him out of his way, but rather served as a short cut to highway ten. He halted in his own drive and sounded the horn. Hank O'Toole came running out of the garage anxious to help his young employer if he could.

"Slip on a jacket and come along," the Blue

Streak called.

Hank ducked back into the garage and came out wearing a flying jacket. He never wore a hat on his mass of tousled red hair, and he never carried any weapon except one of his wrenches. He was grinning happily as he climbed into the car beside the Blue Streak.

"Closing in on a nest of rats, boss?" he asked in eager tones.

"I hope so, but we don't have much to go on," his boss answered.

The Blue Streak sent the speedy car roaring down the drive.

"Never saw the time you needed much to go on," Hank answered.

"This time there're a lot of queer doings," the Blue Streak said and smiled grimly. "Most of them do not fit any pattern."

"We'll bust 'em up," Hank said confidently. "Just see if we don't."

The Blue Streak did not answer. He was sending the high-speed car along at a fast pace. Swinging into highway 10 he headed toward a blue ridge of mountains. He wasn't sure he was on the trail of Marigold, but he needed to learn something about Count Luggar's friends and his mountain place. He had promised Marigold he would look out for Bess, and he had to do that as well as hunt for her

uncle.

At the mouth of a canyon he swung the car into a narrow road. Hank leaned over the side and quickly pulled back. It was easy to see why the road was called Overlook highway. It was cut into the face of a steep cliff. Hank could look down into the depths of the canyon far below, and the sheer drop gave him a sharp sense of hanging somewhere between the earth and the sky. Even the car seemed small and unstable so high above the canyon's bottom.

"This shore is as near to flying as a man can get with a car," Hank O'Toole called across to the Blue Streak.

The Blue Streak nodded. He was noting the wild country ahead. They were knifing into a wilderness about which a host of strange stories had been told. Men had gone into the Skeleton Mountains exploring and had never returned. Searching parties had been lost in the deep canyons and among the rugged granite peaks.

A bend in the road brought them to a small shelf of rock. On the shelf stood a filling station, with a lunchroom perched on log brackets out over the canyon. The Blue Streak pulled in at the gasoline pumps.

"Check the gas and oil," he said as he handed Hank a ten-dollar bill.

Then he walked into the lunchroom. A huge man with a soiled apron tied around his waist sat behind the counter peeling potatoes. He stuck his paring knife into a potato and set the bowl on the counter. The Blue Streak noticed that the paring knife was in reality a heavy-bladed and wicked-looking hunting knife.

"Want somethin', mister?" the huge man asked, looking up at his customer.

"I'll have two cups of coffee and some doughnuts," the Blue Streak said. "My friend is out at the gas pump, but he'll be in in a minute." A glance at the giant behind the counter revealed a smashed nose and two cauliflower ears.

The big man poured coffee from a blackened camp pot and fished a half-dozen soggy doughnuts from a jar. He slid the coffee and doughnuts across the counter.

"That'll be forty cents, mister," he said gruffly turning back to his work.

"Can you direct me to the mountain place of Count Luggar?" the Blue Streak asked.

The big counterman had picked up his strange paring knife and started peeling a potato. At this question he stopped and looked piercingly at his customer.

"Sure," he said slowly. "Just you keep on the Overlook for another ten miles. Can't miss the

place. First open spot on the road."

"Thanks," the Blue Streak said. He tasted the coffee and found it rank and bitter. It must have been in the pot for a long time. He swallowed it with difficulty.

Hank came in and climbed on a stool beside the Blue Streak. "I can do with some sinkers and a mug of java," he said. He bit into a doughnut, then looked at it. "Cast iron," he muttered. Then he took a swallow of coffee. He shoved the cup back and looked at his boss. The Blue Streak was calmly drinking the bitter brew.

The big man walked around the counter toward a phone booth.

"Clean forgot to order fresh supplies today," he mumbled.

Entering the booth he tugged at the door until it shut behind his great bulk.

The Blue Streak lifted a warning finger at Hank and took another swallow of coffee. Hank took a swallow, too, and made a wry face. The Blue Streak listened carefully to the words of the big man. His hearing was as sharp as his other senses and the voice carried out to him.

"He's a-comin' up. You ought to be able to run him off Dead Man's curve," the big man said into the phone.

The Blue Streak shoved his cup back. "I guess we

can go now," he said.

Outside the lunchroom Hank burst out, "I'll bet they don't sell two cups of coffee a week in there, and those doughnuts, phooey!"

"That fellow isn't there to sell food," the Blue Streak said. "He's there to see who goes up the canyon road."

"I think I've seen that bird in the ring somewhere," Hank said.

"I shouldn't wonder but you had," the Blue Streak agreed.

They headed on up the canyon and drove along for several miles. Finally the Blue Streak pulled up at the edge of the road.

"Mind driving a spell?"

"Glad to," Hank said. "It'll keep me from lookin' down into that canyon and wonderin' where I'd land if we went over."

Hank slid under the wheel. The Blue Streak stretched out his legs and watched the road ahead. They were traveling fast and the winding road was narrow. Suddenly, as they rounded a sharp turn they found themselves approaching a speeding black sedan. The sedan swerved in against the cliff. That was its side of the road, but there was not room for the red speedster to pass without plunging over the cliff. Hank started to swing out.

"Hug the cliff wall! Meet them head on!" the Blue

Streak shouted.

As he shouted he leaped up in the seat and dived out over the hood. He landed squarely in front of his car, and took two mighty leaps to meet the on-rushing sedan which carried two men. When they saw that Hank meant to crash into them head on, they began struggling to leap from their rushing car.

The Blue Streak planted his feet firmly, caught the fender of the sedan and swung it off the road, heading it out into space. As it dropped past him he reached into it, tearing the door open. Then the machine hurtled to destruction on the rocks far below while the Blue Streak stood in the road holding a squirming man in each hand. Hank had stopped the speedster and was staring at his boss.

"What a trick!" he bellowed.

The Blue Streak shook the two men. Deftly and before they recovered from their fright he frisked them and tossed their guns far down into the canyon.

"Now you can tell me where your boss took John Marigold," he snapped.

"We don't know nothing about him," one of the men whined.

The Blue Streak caught the fellow up and swung him out over the canyon.

"Start talking or I'll toss you down there on top

of your car," he hissed.

The man yelled loudly, "Don't let go of me! I'll talk!"

His companion started running up the road. Hank leaned out of the car and rapped the fellow over the head with the wrench he carried. The gangster's knees buckled and he folded up like a rag. Hank slid out from under the wheel and stood over him.

"Where's Marigold?" the Blue Streak repeated.

"If I tell you I won't live an hour," the fellow wailed.

"If you don't tell me you won't live five minutes," the Blue Streak grated as he gripped the man again.

"I'll show you if you let me get clean away before you go near the place," the man whined.

"Who is your boss?" the Blue Streak demanded.

"I don't know who the boss is, but no man can live who bungles a job, and we bungled this one."

The Blue Streak was convinced the man did not know who the mastermind was. He would find that out later.

"Show us the place," he said grimly as he shoved the man toward his car.

"What'll I do with this here sleeping beauty?" Hank asked.

"Prop him up in the shade, he'll come to after a bit," the Blue Streak said. "This man is all we need."

"It won't do even you no good to find the place,"

the man said. "You're the strongest man I've ever seen, but you won't get into that place."

"You show me the place and then let me worry about getting in," the Blue Streak said grimly.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE OLD QUARRY

The captured gangster showed the Blue Streak and Hank a side road which branched off the canyon road and headed up through a dense stand of giant spruce.

"Do you know where the old marble quarry is?" he asked.

"No, but you can show us," the Blue Streak answered.

"I don't dare go any closer than here," the man whined.

"I'll protect you," the Blue Streak promised. "I'm saving you for the police."

"He probably wants to get to a phone and call the big shot who actually runs his gang," Hank cut in.

The Blue Streak nodded. "You're going with us. If we don't find Mr. Marigold safe we'll turn you in for murder."

"I didn't do nothing to him. All I did was do as Slick Joe said to do," the man muttered.

He lifted a shaky hand to a scarred face which was covered with patches of a dark stubby beard.

The Blue Streak nodded toward the side road

and Hank turned into it. It was steep and rutted so that the automobile was forced to take the grade in low gear.

"We're makin' a lot of noise," Hank said with a frown. "They'll be sure to hear us coming a mile away."

"How much farther do we have to go?" the Blue Streak asked.

"More'n a mile," the prisoner replied in a surly undertone.

As they moved on they began to pass slabs and broken pieces of white marble, waste material from the abandoned quarry.

Five minutes later he said, "She's just ahead, but you might as well finish me off here, I'll get it if I go up with you."

"Pull off the road and drive into that grove of trees. You stay and watch our friend here while I have a look at the quarry," the Blue Streak said to Hank.

"I'll watch him but I'd rather go with you," Hank answered.

"I'll sing out if I need you," his boss replied.

The Blue Streak had leaped over the side of the low speedster.

"Shucks," Hank said. "I'll miss out on all the fun."

The Blue Streak moved through the trees at a

swift pace. He leaped from rock to rock through a jumble of broken granite and white marble slabs. The granite slabs had fallen away from a cliff and many of them were as large as a small house. The Blue Streak crossed this barrier by leaping from rock to rock. He had a feeling the abductors of Mari-gold would not believe it possible for a man to cross that slide, and so would not watch that avenue of approach.

Climbing upward he came to a bench running around the face of a towering mountain. A wild scene unfolded below and above him. The peaks of the mountain were high in the clouds while below lay a wilderness of tumbled rock and yawning canyons. He saw the gaping mouth of the old deserted quarry a quarter of a mile ahead and moved toward it.

Coming to the edge of the bench he stood looking into the deep crevice. Dusky shadows filled the yawning chasm and its walls rose straight up on each side. It offered a formidable barrier, impassable to man or beast.

The Blue Streak smiled eagerly. This was one time the gang in the quarry would be surprised. Undoubtedly they had heard the car coming up the steep grade and would be expecting visitors from that direction. He felt sure that occasionally a hardy adventurer drove up that road, so the crooks

must have a way of explaining their presence at the quarry, should anyone pass that way.

The Blue Streak walked back a few yards to survey the thirty-foot leap between the crevice walls. His muscles tensed and bulged under the tight-fitting red trousers which allowed him full freedom of action. He crouched for a moment, then sprang forward at terrific speed. At the edge of the chasm he leaped free in a high arc.

It was a tremendous leap, even for the superior strength of the Blue Streak. He landed on the far ledge and balanced there for a second, then moved forward at a swift pace, leaping from boulder to fallen tree and across lesser cracks and fissures.

The Blue Streak paused at the edge of a stand of timber to look about him.

The old quarry sloped into the mountain. The white marble veins lay at an angle, and the miners had taken them out from the bottom upward leaving a high, gleaming ceiling of marble. The imperfect slabs had been set up, forming a wall along one side.

His lips tightened at the sight. The huge slabs were five or six feet thick and they had been placed to form a wall that reached to the mouth of the quarry, thus closing off a part of it. As the Blue Streak stood there he heard a tractor and saw it move through a gate. As he watched, the tractor

backed through an opening in the wall. A great slab of marble swung around, pulled by the tractor. The slab closed the opening in the wall.

"So, that is the way they hide their den," he said softly. "No wonder that fellow said no one could get into it."

He began to move down toward the wall at a swift trot.

Looking at that part of the quarry which was walled in, the Blue Streak saw that a corner of the quarry had been cleverly closed off. There did not seem to be any windows or doors at all, now that the tractor had pulled the block of marble into place. He moved along the wall and finally came to a place near the solid face of the mountain where there was a wide crack.

The Blue Streak looked through the crack and blinked to accustom his eyes to the gray light inside. He saw a large room with cots and a table, a stove and many boxes. On a chair beside the table sat John Marigold, his feet and hands bound, a gag twisted tightly over his mouth. Two burly fellows stood before him, and a third was approaching them from the tractor which stood at the lower end of the long room.

"We might as well finish him off, he won't sign nothing," one of the men said. He turned toward the man coming from the tractor. "Get the station

wagon ready, Muckle, we're haulin' this old codger out of here feet first."

"O.K., Crusher," Muckle called.

He turned about and walked into a dark passageway.

The man called Crusher faced Marigold.

"You'd best sign that letter and get it over with. This is yer last chance," he said. He picked up a heavy club from the table. "Do you see this here billy? I'm agoin' to rap you with it. Now are you goin' to sign the paper?"

Marigold shook his head.

"He's shore a stubborn old coot. All we want is fer him to sign a note to the gal. It won't cost him nothing but he's jest too stubborn."

Crusher's pal leaned forward. "We're bashin' ye over the head and dumpin' ye into a cave if ye don't sign."

Again Marigold shook his head. The Blue Streak admired the old man's courage, but he had no time to waste if he was to save his client's life. Crusher was a huge fellow and his head was set on his broad shoulders without benefit of any neck. His pal was almost as big a man. The arms which reached below his knees made him look like a huge ape.

The Blue Streak whirled and moved along the wall to the spot where the marks of the tractor

treads showed him the tremendous block of marble had been moved into place. Many times before he had moved huge objects with the sheer strength of his powerful body. Once he even had moved a loaded truck up a bank in order to free its trapped driver.

He set his shoulder against the solid rock and shoved hard. The block did not move. He dug his feet down upon solid rock under the loose mold on the ground and bent to get greater leverage, then he heaved, his muscles standing out like steel cables on his back and legs. The granite slab moved a bit, very slowly at first, then faster. The Blue Streak's face was crimson from his terrific effort and his breath hissed between his teeth as he heaved. The slab moved and an opening showed. It widened until there was room for his body to pass. Relaxing suddenly, he took a deep breath and nimbly leaped into the dimly lighted room.

"Hey! Here comes a guy!" one of the men shouted.

"How'd he get in here! Muckle! You fool, you didn't close the gate tight!"

"Aw, he ain't got a gun and I got the rifle." Muckle's voice came from behind the Blue Streak, who had leaped into the room.

Whirling, he leaped at Muckle. The man was lifting a high-powered rifle and taking aim. The

Blue Streak leaped to the side a full ten feet, then charged. The amazed Muckle fired one shot. The bullet missed the Blue Streak but creased Crusher and sent him spinning to the floor.

Then the Blue Streak's hard body hit Muckle with terrific force. The rifle crashed against a marble wall and Muckle went as limp as a wet rag. His face turned green and his eyes glazed with pain. He crashed to the stone floor and lay there moaning.

The Blue Streak whirled and charged toward Crusher's pal, who had lifted the heavy club and was about to bring it down upon Marigold's defenseless head. In two leaps which would have done credit to a mountain lion, the Blue Streak was upon the man. One blow hurled aside the club, another crumpled the killer.

Swiftly he removed the gag and unbound John Marigold. The old man had to be steadied as he got to his feet.

"Looks as if you need more protecting than Bess does," the Blue Streak said grimly.

"Kidnappers!" Marigold rasped. "By Harry, I'll have the truth out of them. They're part of the scheme to fleece Bess."

"I'd say you were right, but can we make them talk?"

"The police will," Marigold fumed. Then he looked at his rescuer. "Lucky that fool left the gate

open a bit."

The Blue Streak grinned.

"It was," he agreed.

They bound the killers and Marigold stood guard over them while the Blue Streak started for the speedster. Before leaving he picked up a typewritten sheet lying on the table. The message the men had been trying to force Marigold to sign was written on his own stationery and, as the Blue Streak knew from the odd type, with his own typewriter. Bess would have noticed that at once. The message was directed to her. It read:

Dear Bess:

I am leaving on an unexpected business trip to the West coast. I'll be gone for some time looking over a business deal for a client. I have fooled you very neatly, I think. I found out you were investing in Empire Unknown. This is a good investment. Put all you can into it. Sorry I was so grumpy.

Your Uncle John

He folded the note and handed it to Marigold.

"Better turn this over to the police," he said shortly.

"There may be some fingerprints on it," Marigold said.

"There are none." The Blue Streak's keen eyes

had seen that at a glance. "Whoever wrote it wore gloves." He pointed down at Crusher. The man wore light dress gloves. "Crusher was wearing gloves, too. The only prints Bess could have found on it would have been yours."

"Diabolically clever," Marigold sputtered. "We're up against brains somewhere in this mess." He scowled down at the three prisoners. "But the brains aren't in any I've met so far. Those fellows not only act like punch-drunk gorillas, but I don't believe that they share a whole brain among them. They might have been responsible if this only involved a kidnapping, but it is obvious that Bess's fortune is the real thing at stake."

"You're right about that," the Blue Streak answered. He turned away and hurried off.

Hank was seated on the lowered top of the car, his feet in the seat, a heavy wrench swinging from one hand. His captive sat crouched in the seat. Hank grinned at his boss.

"He tried to pull a fast one on me and I had to rap him gently on the bean. How'd you make out in there?"

"I got there in time to save Marigold from getting more than a gentle rap on the bean," the Blue Streak returned grimly. "We'll drive up and get him."

Loading the three crooks into the speedster re-

quired some figuring, but Hank was equal to it. He roped them on like packs across a trail horse's back. The first man they had caught was also roped and added to the load.

As they drove homeward, Marigold seemed to slump down and lose his power to talk. It was clear that the shock and strain of his adventure had made him a sick man. They turned their prisoners over to state troopers at a way station and hurried to the Marigold estate.

Stafford was so glad to see his employer that he lost his dignity and rushed about like an excited boy.

"I'll call Dr. Medusa at once," he said, as soon as they had John Marigold safely in his own bed again.

"I'll just wait until the doctor comes," the Blue Streak said.

The doctor arrived promptly, and hurried to Marigold's bedside. He gave the Blue Streak only a glance and a nod. After a brief examination he shook his head.

"Severe shock. He must remain perfectly quiet." He turned to Stafford. "See that he has no visitors, none at all." The doctor turned and glanced at the Blue Streak. "Tell Bess he must see absolutely no one. In his condition so severe a shock may well cause his death."

"The police will have to question him," the Blue Streak said.

"I'll talk with the chief of police, myself," Dr. Medusa said. "This man is in an extremely dangerous condition. Only complete rest can possibly save his life."

"You'd best go now, sir," Stafford said nervously to the Blue Streak.

"I'll have a special nurse here within an hour. Prepare accommodations for three weeks, and put her up as near his room as possible." Ignoring the Blue Streak, Medusa spoke to Stafford.

The Blue Streak hesitated a minute, then he said, "Were you here last night, doctor?"

"No, I was operating at the hospital," Medusa said shortly.

The Blue Streak nodded and left the room. Stafford followed him outside.

"I'm everlastingly grateful to you, sir, for rescuing him," he said.

"Keep an eye on the doctor and the nurse," the Blue Streak said. "Just notice what they do. I'll be around to talk with you."

"Certainly, but I know nothing about medicine. Mr. Marigold has perfect confidence in Doctor Medusa, you know."

"Certainly, Stafford, but I'm an inquisitive fellow. I never saw a case of shock like this one. I'd

like to know just how a doctor treats this one." He grinned and patted Stafford's arm. "If he should happen to ask about Bess, be sure to tell him I'm looking out for her."

CHAPTER FIVE

STRANGE HOUSE GUESTS

Hank was waiting impatiently when the Blue Streak came out of the Marigold house. This case puzzled him. Usually his boss leaped in and smashed apart any barriers the criminals had erected, taking them without regard to their bombs or bullets. The boss was acting like a detective on this case. Hank was worried. He was the worrying sort of person and always expected the Blue Streak to suddenly cease to be a superman just when he needed his terrific power. He eyed him critically as he stepped to the car.

"Everything O.K., boss?" he asked anxiously.

"I'm afraid not," the Blue Streak answered with a frown.

"Let's get going and clean up." Hank swung open the door.

"We're heading back to the mountains. I've a hunch Bess Marigold will be needing our help," the Blue Streak replied.

Hank grunted. He had been planning upon toasting his feet before the fire at home. Heading back into the mountains at this hour meant spending a part of the night there. Nevertheless he swung

the speedster around and headed down the drive.

"Keep her up to the speed limit," the Blue Streak ordered.

The order was unnecessary. Hank always drove at least up to the limit. If there was no limit he tried to make the torpedo fly. They roared along through the thickly settled valley and headed into the mountains. The outlines of Skeleton Range lifted high and gloomy ahead.

As the torpedo nosed up the winding road, overhanging cliffs cast deep shadows over it and the wind moaned through the boughs of the spruce forests clinging to the steep slopes. Hank glanced uneasily ahead. The road had narrowed to a one-way lane with occasional turnout spots which were just wide enough to allow two cars to pass with a tiny margin of safety.

"Funny sort of spot to pick for a summer home," he growled.

"It is," his boss agreed grimly.

"We're headed straight for the country of the big caves," Hank added. "That neck of the woods has a bad name."

The Blue Streak laughed. "That's the way it always is. A place has a bad name until it has been explored and mapped out."

"So far nobody ever got back out of those caves with a map," Hank answered.

The Blue Streak said nothing. They had rounded a shoulder of rock and entered a tiny valley which nestled like a green bowl in the lap of the giant mountains rising above it. There was a crystal lake and a patch of forest. On the shore of the lake stood a three-story log building with a wide porch along one side. Below the building were corrals and stables. The flags of a golf course showed on a bench above and several tennis courts crowded in beside the main structure. Hank heaved a sigh of relief.

"Looks like civilization at last," he said with a glance at his young employer.

"Nice place, and well secluded," the Blue Streak said.

As they pulled up before the house a boat moved in from the lake. They saw Bess Marigold and Count Luggar step out of the boat. The Blue Streak waited for the couple.

"Well, if it isn't the superman," Luggar said with a slight sneer.

Bess gave the Blue Streak a cold, level look. She turned to the count.

"Do you need a strong man without many brains, for working in the barns?" she asked with exaggerated innocence.

"No, we have a stable boy," Luggar said with a grin.

Bess turned back to the Blue Streak. "In that case you had better be on your way. *I* certainly don't need you."

"Have you been in touch with your home within the last few hours?" asked the Blue Streak, not disturbed by her rudeness.

"Yes, I have talked with Doctor Medusa. Uncle John got into a mess, but he's coming along nicely."

"Did you talk with him?"

"No, but the doctor gave me a full report. It was like Uncle John to get himself into a mess like that." Her chin came up and her eyes began to show anger. "But I'm not wasting my time talking to you."

She turned and they walked away.

Count Luggar paused at the steps of the house. He faced the Blue Streak.

"I suggest you leave at once or I shall order my men to throw you off the place," he said threateningly.

Bess laughed eagerly.

"Why don't you? I'd enjoy seeing a superman tossed out on his ear," she cried.

The Blue Streak gave her a grim look. "I'm not accustomed to wasting my time, Miss Marigold, and I certainly do not force my services on anyone. I'll be on my way." He turned and strode to the

speedster.

Hank grinned at him. "You sure got the brush-off, boss. Looks like we'll be havin' a midnight supper at home."

"I wonder," the Blue Streak mused. "I ought to leave her to those crooks, but she has me interested now."

He laughed softly in reminiscence.

"Wish they'd tried throwing us out of here," Hank said.

They headed out of the little valley and down the road. A black and murky night was settling down. Clouds had closed in around the peaks and were sucking through the valley and the canyon, driven by a moaning wind. Huge drops of rain splashed against the windshield.

"A cloudburst would be bad in this canyon," Hank muttered.

"Hold up!" his boss shouted.

Hank slapped on the brakes. The torpedo skidded to a halt. Its powerful headlights played on the rear of a coupé which had nosed off the road. Hank switched on the spotlight and played it over the bank. The car had been saved from a plunge into the depths by a big tree. The light showed a man lying half out of the open door of the automobile.

The Blue Streak swung out of the torpedo. Step-

ping to the bank he put his shoulder against the side of the coupé and eased it upward until he could lift the pinned body from under the wheel. As he laid the man on the edge of the road a groan passed the blood-flecked lips. The man's eyes opened and he stared up at the Blue Streak. Surprise showed in his eyes.

"I must have dropped off to sleep and missed the road," he muttered.

The Blue Streak knelt beside the battered man. "Anyone else with you?"

"No. Headed for Count Luggar's place. How much farther?" The man leaned heavily against the Blue Streak's arm.

"You'll be better off in a hospital, my friend. What's your name?"

"Alan Gibbs. Lucky to get an invitation up here. Good Old Joe and Mamie wangled it for me." Gibbs sighed deeply.

"You don't know the count or anyone at his place?" the Blue Streak asked.

"No. Joe Gort got me the invitation. He tipped me off that by visiting up there I'd get a chance to sell the count and a rich Dr. Medusa some bonds. I'm a bond salesman."

"Know this Joe and Mamie very well?" the Blue Streak asked.

"Well, just from meeting them in different places.

They seem to get around in a pretty good crowd." Gibbs sagged back.

"I'm sending you to the hospital. I'm on my way up to Count Luggar's place, myself. I'll tell them you won't be able to make it." The Blue Streak shot Hank a warning look. "Help me load him into the torpedo."

They placed Gibbs in the car. With Hank lifting his feet and the Blue Streak his shoulders, they were able to move him without causing him great pain. When he had settled down with a groan the Blue Streak nodded to Hank.

They walked to the bank and stood there. "I'm putting her back on the road. Think you can make her run?"

"Sure," Hank said. "Front end isn't bashed in much."

The Blue Streak stepped over the bank. He caught hold of the bumper and heaved upward. The coupé lifted and slid toward the road. Hank bent forward. The strength of his boss always amazed him.

"Stand clear," the Blue Streak said.

With a pull and a heave he slid the coupé back onto the road. Hank sprang forward and lifted the hood.

"Tune her up while I slip into a suit of Mr. Gibbs's clothes. Good thing he's about my size." The

Blue Streak chuckled.

While Hank got the engine running and straightened one fender a bit his boss changed clothes. He tucked his own outfit into the suitcase from which he had removed the clothing. Reluctantly he stowed away the bullet-proof vest and his helmet. They were really a part of him and without them he was vulnerable to bullets and lead-loaded billy clubs.

"Gosh, boss, you look like a café dandy," Hank blurted out as the Blue Streak faced him.

"Take Gibbs in to a hospital. Unless I miss my guess it will be several days before he's able to phone his regrets to Count Luggar. I'll not need more than one night at the count's place," his disguised employer said.

"Want me to slip back up this way tomorrow?" Hank asked.

"Yes. See if you can locate a side road where you can hide the torpedo. Don't let the gang up there see you. Now be off."

Hank got into the torpedo and waited to make sure the Blue Streak had no trouble in getting the coupé into gear and away. The little car responded smoothly and slid quietly away into the night, however.

The Blue Streak had found several of Alan Gibbs's cards in a pocket of the coat he was wearing. He

had one ready when he pulled up at the porch of the log building. A dim light shone above the door. As he switched off his engine a burly man waddled laboriously down the steps and peered curiously at the car.

"I'm Alan Gibbs," the Blue Streak said smoothly. "Count Luggar is expecting me."

A beefy face with small ears standing out on each side, and little eyes peering from deep sockets, shoved close to him. A chesty voice said, "Follow me, sir. I'll take yer bags."

The Blue Streak grinned. The butler had made one tiny slip in his language which spotted him as something other than a professional servant such as would be hired by a count.

"Thank you, Jake," he said, and handed the huge man a half dollar.

"I'm Midge, sir." Midge palmed the half dollar expertly.

"Right behind you, Midge." The Blue Streak almost laughed.

He followed the butler into a dark hall and from there to a big room with a huge fireplace at one end. Tables were set near the fire, and benches, chesterfields, lounges and easy chairs were scattered about. Bess and the count were seated on a low stool before the fire. There was one man and two other women present. The Blue Streak recog-

nized the pretty redhead who had been Doctor Medusa's dinner partner. He saw that Bess and the count both remembered him as the handsome man Bess had flirted with in the café. Luggar arose, a frown creasing his brow.

"Mr. Alan Gibbs," Midge announced in a loud voice.

"Glad you could make it, old fellow," Luggar said, his frown changing to a smile.

Bess laughed eagerly, her eyes dancing. "Haven't we met before?" she asked.

The Blue Streak bowed over her hand. "I think we have," he said.

"Fine, fine," Luggar said with a crafty smile. Then he shot a glance at Midge and gave him a signal behind the guest's back. Midge grinned eagerly and shuffled away.

"Count Luggar has a fine dance floor." Bess nodded toward the space beyond the tables. "And he has some swell records for the radio-phonograph."

"I'd be honored," the Blue Streak said. "But I should go to my room and unpack." He had been keeping an eye on his suitcase which Midge had set just inside the door of the big room.

"Certainly," Luggar said. "When you have freshened up a bit we'll have dinner."

He pressed a button and a tall man dressed in

the black suit and string tie of a servant came into the room.

"Sully, see Mr. Gibbs to the corner room in the north wing." Luggar smiled broadly. He turned to his guest. "The only room I have left that's in shape for a guest. Be very careful of the balcony. It needs a bit of repairing. I wouldn't use it if I were you. I think it's unsafe."

The Blue Streak followed Sully out of the room and up two flights of stairs. He smiled a bit as he remembered how Bess had acted. She had been really glad to see him. She might dislike the Blue Streak, but it was certain she liked Mr. Alan Gibbs very much.

After he left the room Count Luggar said, "I'll have to tear myself away for a few minutes. New help in the kitchen, you know." He shook his head. "I do hope Mr. Gibbs remembers not to step out on that balcony."

He bowed, kissed Bess's hand, and hurried out of the room.

In the hall just off the kitchen he met Midge. Midge was grinning.

"Joe sure sent us a pretty boy this time," he said happily.

"He sent one I'll be glad to see go into the cavern. I'll feel a lot easier with him made into a statue." Luggar's lips pulled into a snarl. "Bess has taken

too much of a fancy to him."

"Figure he's cut you out?" Midge asked.

"No man can take a woman away from me," Luggar said haughtily. "But get this. Crack his neck, and dump him off the balcony. I've planned it with the gang downstairs. Bess has to believe it was an accident."

"Sure, I been doin' this stunt long enough to know how," Midge growled.

"This time there is to be no shadow of suspicion. Bess fancies this bond peddler and she might make a fuss if it isn't handled smoothly." Luggar scowled at Midge.

"Jest you forget it, I'll knock him off and dump him neat as can be. He'll be in the guest room at the cavern before midnight."

"He'd better be. Medusa will be waiting up there to work on him," Luggar said.

Five minutes later he entered the big lounge room again. He was smiling and obviously in high spirits.

"As soon as Mr. Gibbs comes down we will have dinner. I have a special treat for you. My men shot two wild turkeys yesterday. Miss Bess snared ten fine rainbow trout. We will have a special banquet, and then an evening of dancing," he informed his guests.

"That will be fine," Bess said.

Count Luggar hid a frown. He was sure her eagerness to dance was caused by the presence of Mr. Alan Gibbs. He was glad he had taken steps to have Mr. Gibbs removed.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CRUSHER

The Blue Streak wished to get rid of Sully as quickly as possible. He sensed danger in the old house and in the men who served Count Luggar. Sully puttered around the room. He opened a window leading to the balcony, then he dusted off the dresser.

At last, facing the Blue Streak, he said, "Shall I lay out your clothes, sir?"

"No, thanks, Sully. I'll make out fine." The Blue Streak smiled at Sully.

The servant straightened gaunt shoulders. He regarded the new guest out of deep-set, black eyes. His colorless face made the caverns around his eyes look like black pools. But it was his hands which attracted the Blue Streak's attention. They were soft, white hands with long tapering fingers. They might well have been the hands of a famous organist.

"Very well, Mr. Gibbs," Sully said and backed away. He backed out of the room and closed the door softly.

The Blue Streak glided across the floor. He whipped off his coat and hung it over a chair, then

he placed the chair before the keyhole of the door. There was no transom, and a blank wall offered no chance for spying eyes. He walked to the balcony window and looked out. From the balcony there was a sheer three-story drop to a rocky ledge against which the waves of the mountain lake slapped gently.

Turning back he removed his own outfit from the suitcase and tucked it under the mattress of the bed. Then he laid out Alan Gibbs's toilet things, his socks and shirts. Off the bedroom there was a small washroom with a shower. The Blue Streak smiled eagerly. He liked a cold shower.

"Might as well enjoy the hospitality of this place," he said softly.

Quickly he took a cold shower and a rubdown, then slipped into Gibbs's clothes. As he removed the coat from the chair before the door his sensitive ears heard a sound outside. He eased himself into the coat and caught hold of the doorknob. He opened the door gently.

The hall seemed deserted. It was dark and the log beams overhead showed like the ghostly ribs of some monster. He moved out into the hall with careless ease. In reality his every muscle and nerve was tuned to a high pitch. Someone was in the hall. Even his eyes, able to stab into the shadowy corners, saw nothing, yet he knew someone was near

him.

Walking down the hall toward the stairway he listened and sniffed the air. He passed a door leading into a room on the right. To the eyes of an ordinary person that doorway would have been just a square of blackness. The Blue Streak saw what it hid. A huge man was standing there. He lunged forward without making any noise. Big hands closed around the Blue Streak's neck and powerful fingers clamped tight, then began a swift, twisting motion. At the same instant a massive knee came up swiftly and hit the superdetective in the back with staggering force.

Like steel cables the muscles under those big hands tightened as the Blue Streak twisted around until one hand caught his assailant's right hand. He felt hot breath on his neck and heard his attacker grunt as he applied all his strength. The Blue Streak's grip closed on the man's arm, it crushed down and he began to twist sharply. The grip on his neck was loosened and he saw the leering face of Midge. A savage twist and jerk spun Midge around as though he had not weighed anything at all.

A scream of pain burst from the lips of the killer as he sagged to his knees.

"Le' go! Yer breakin' me arm!" he wailed.

The Blue Streak jerked him to his feet and

smashed him back against the wall. His marvelous strength was an irresistible force to Midge. The huge butler realized with surprise that his own might was puny beside the vigor of Alan Gibbs. Gibbs was speaking to him now. Midge heard the voice through waves of sharp pain.

"You are a nasty servant, Midge," he said in a cool voice.

"I thought you wuz somebody else," Midge muttered. His arm was dangling and he rubbed and massaged it gingerly.

"The next time you try a trick like that on me I'll show you how to break a man's neck, do you understand?" the Blue Streak snapped.

"Yes, Mr. Gibbs," Midge whined.

"Do you want me to report this to Count Luggar?"

"Don't you tell him or he'll fire me," Midge begged.

"You know you ought to be fired," the Blue Streak said grimly. "You're not safe to have around."

"I'll not bother you again." Midge said as he edged away.

"I'll give you another chance," the Blue Streak said. "Just remember what I told you."

Midge ducked into the dark doorway and ran across the room on the right. The Blue Streak heard a door slam and after that heavy steps pounded on

a stairway.

"Now just why did they want to murder Alan Gibbs?" the Blue Streak asked softly as he walked to the stairs. "I'd better play along until I get to the bottom of this mess."

He appeared at the foot of the stairs without having made a sound in walking down. Count Luggar was talking to Bess and Della, the redheaded girl.

"Oh, there you are," Bess called, having seen the Blue Streak.

Luggar got to his feet. For just a second his eyes betrayed surprise and annoyance, then he smiled affably.

"Everyone is famished. We'll go right into the dining-room."

The Blue Streak grinned broadly. He had an impish desire to irritate the count. He stepped over to Bess and said, "May I escort you to the dining-room?"

Bess jumped up and caught his arm. Della laughed and took Count Luggar's arm. Two other couples stood waiting. Luggar laughed but the Blue Streak saw a gleam of anger in his eyes.

"I usually arrange my guests, but if this suits Miss Bess, it will suit me."

"Oh, it suits me. I'm dying to ask Alan a lot of questions," Bess said eagerly.

The Blue Streak grinned down at her. "I hope I can answer all of them truthfully," he said.

"You hadn't better try fibbing to me," Bess warned.

They walked into the dining-room and were seated. The Blue Streak began to regret having picked Bess as a dinner partner. She wanted to talk all the time and he wanted to watch the people Luggar had as his guests.

Three couples had come in from horseback riding along the mountain trails. Another couple had been fishing, and Doctor Medusa appeared suddenly. He entered from the back of the dining-room and it seemed to the Blue Streak that he acted much as though he owned the place. Alan Gibbs was presented to each of them, and back of his smiling composure he gave each a sharp scrutiny.

Doctor Medusa nodded to him and gave him a piercing glance that came very near being a frown, but ended in a smile. The Blue Streak was sure Medusa had received a careful report on what had happened.

"You sell bonds, Mr. Gibbs?" he asked.

"When you wish to invest see Alan Gibbs," the Blue Streak said and laughed.

"I have some funds to invest," Medusa said.

"Pleasure before business," the Blue Streak said with a smile. "Suppose we have a chat after din-

ner?"

"Indeed we will," Medusa said.

"That reminds me," Count Luggar broke in. "I would like some advice."

"You men aren't going to break up our dancing party," Bess broke in. "You can talk business tomorrow. Tonight I'm going to teach Alan to jitter-bug."

The Blue Streak grinned at her. "I never take dangerous risks," he said.

After that Doctor Medusa took over the conversation. By the way he handled it the Blue Streak was satisfied that at least four couples and Bess Marigold were innocent guests. He decided the redheaded Della was in with Medusa along with Count Luggar and the servants. He wondered what their game was and what plans they had for Bess beyond getting her fortune away from her. The part Alan Gibbs had played had him puzzled. He knew the sort of hold Midge had tried to use on him. The squat, powerful butler would have killed the real Gibbs with one vicious twist of his big hands.

The dinner went off smoothly. Bess was lively and enjoyed herself, though she showed some spirit when Count Luggar suggested she go for a moonlight ride with him on the lake while Medusa and Alan Gibbs talked business. The temper the Blue

Streak had met several times before flared up. The count did not insist. Evidently he, too, had met her anger on occasion, and dared not risk rousing it tonight. Her interest in Alan Gibbs was obvious, and understandingly annoying to the count.

The Blue Streak would have liked to ask about John Marigold but there was no way in which Alan Gibbs could have known about Marigold's injury. Gibbs wasn't even supposed to know Bess's uncle.

After dinner Doctor Medusa walked with Della to the big room and stood with her a few minutes, talking intently. Finally he turned and spoke to Count Luggar.

"You young folks go ahead with your dancing. I have a bit of research work, some notes and reports I must write up. I'll have a talk with Mr. Gibbs later in the evening." He bowed to Della and left the room.

The young couples gathered around the radio-phonograph and began picking out records. The Blue Streak noticed that Luggar slipped away and that Della soon followed. Bess was eagerly arguing about swing music with a young lawyer. The Blue Streak slipped out through the door by which Luggar had left the room.

It was not a part of the Blue Streak's plan to draw suspicion upon himself by being caught prowling around the house, but he did wish to have a quick

look. He closed the door to the big room and found himself in a hall. At one end he looked into the kitchen. Two men servants were at work there. They did not look dangerous. Turning right, he stepped through a door and out onto a terrace overlooking the lake. He returned and tried the only other door leading off the hall. It opened into the garage. He saw a black sedan and Gibbs's coupé on one side. On the other were a station wagon and two low-slung, speedy looking cars of foreign make. The place was lighted and no one was about. A glance showed the Blue Streak that there were no visible doors except the sliding ones at the front entrance. He hurried back to the big room a bit puzzled.

As soon as he entered Bess grabbed him.

"Come on, let's jitterbug, Alan," she cried, smiling gaily at the young man.

The Blue Streak's grin was not very eager. Before he could think of an excuse Bess had him whirling across the floor.

Doctor Medusa sat behind a glass-topped table. He had crossed the terrace behind the buildings and entered a tunnel which took him underground into a spacious room that was really a large cave. The room was fitted out with intricate laboratory equipment. He sat at his desk frowning until Lug-

gar and Della entered.

Della seated herself beside his desk, Luggar stood beside it. He was clearly irritated. Medusa fixed him with a steely glance, and waited for him to speak.

"If I'm to marry this Marigold girl, I don't want her falling for this fellow Gibbs. Letting her play around with him won't help me any." Luggar scowled as he spoke.

"And whose fault is it that Mr. Gibbs is playing around with her?" Medusa demanded.

"It was that bungling Midge who muffed things," Luggar growled. "He let that sap almost twist his arm off."

"Yes, I treated Midge's arm," Medusa said. "Your Mr. Gibbs has science and strength." He tapped the top of the table. "I think that this is one time when Joe and Mamie did not pick a specimen carefully enough."

"I found the bonds Luggar ordered. Gibbs had left them in a leather wallet in the glove compartment of his car," Della said.

"Put them back," Medusa snapped.

"What'll I do when he asks me for the money for them?" Luggar asked. "I had Della find them before I turned Midge loose on him. We better put a bullet through him tonight and make sure we don't have to pay for those five hundred thousand dollars'

worth of bonds."

Medusa regarded Luggar intently. "We can give him the five hundred thousand when he delivers the bonds."

"Pay him for them?" Luggar asked in amazement.

"Certainly. Later we will recover the money. I'd suggest you use the high-powered elk rifle with the silencer. It would be best to make the kill by daylight. Have the boys deliver the body to me at once." He got to his feet, a mocking smile on his lips. "Would you care to see my latest statue?" he asked them.

"I have to rush back to the party," Della said hastily.

"You are in no hurry, Count Luggar," Medusa said softly. "Mr. Gibbs will entertain Miss Mari-gold."

Luggar stared at him. His face had paled a little, and he muttered something under his breath, but he followed Doctor Medusa across the room. They passed through a stone archway and Medusa pushed a light button flooding a great cavern with white light.

The cavern had an arched ceiling from which hung stalactites of gleaming crystal. From the floor stalagmites rose higher than the head of a tall man. Along one side of this crystal cavern there was a

marble platform. On the platform stood a row of gleaming statuary. The poses were lifelike, as were the faces and forms of the statues. Luggar stared at them, his eyes fastening on one placed near the end of the line.

Medusa laughed softly.

"Jerome Keller looks quite natural, don't you think?" he asked.

Luggar nodded. He had seen that statue when it was alive. That had been less than a week before. His eyes turned upon Doctor Medusa. He could not help looking at the doctor.

"You think I am mad?" Medusa chuckled.

"No, of course not." Luggar tried to make his voice sound natural. He knew Medusa was mad, but he was afraid of him and his wild plans.

"But I *am* mad, Count Luggar. I am mad but I have the most brilliant mind in the whole world. From everyone here I have received money, and after I have taken their money I have made them immortal. They will never fade away or dissolve into dust. My process uses the natural depositing process which made these beautiful stalactites and stalagmites. Only my process does in days what nature takes ages to produce." He laughed and patted Luggar's arm.

"They look too natural, give me the creeps," Luggar said.

"You were a good crook, Charlie, and you make a good count, a better count than the real Count Luggar, but you don't appreciate my great scheme." Medusa laughed. "I brought you here to tell you what I have decided about you and the Marigold girl."

Luggar faced him and waited.

"She has a terrible temper, Charlie. She'd fight with you and make you a poor wife. I have a plan to get her money. After that she will grace this little platform." Medusa pointed to a marble block. "Mr. Gibbs will stand next to her. He deserves a fine place because he has brought us five hundred thousand dollars' worth of bonds."

Luggar started to protest. He had been promised a free hand to marry Bess. His eyes followed those of Medusa and rested on a third empty block of marble. He closed his mouth, then opened it slowly.

"As you wish," he said.

"Fine. See that you use the elk rifle on Mr. Gibbs, and hurry back to your party. Because Midge failed me I will have nothing to do tonight, and will join you later."

Luggar hurried out of the cavern and through the smaller room. He was almost running as he passed through the underground passage and stood before a massive stone door. He could not open

that ten-foot-thick door, only Medusa could open it. He waited after giving a signal on a bell. Presently the great mass of stone slid aside and he hurried out into an open courtyard. From there he walked rapidly to the beautiful house he was supposed to own.

His scowl deepened as he entered the back door. He was thinking about that third block of marble. Medusa had plainly hinted that he might be put there as a crystal statue if he did not do as the mad doctor ordered. Entering the big front room he stood watching the couples dancing. Bess saw him and waved a hand to him. Luggar smiled and advanced to claim a dance with her.

The Blue Streak had managed to slip out of the dance. He was wiping his forehead and shaking his head. The jitterbug steps had been fine exercise, but he was a bit clumsy. He walked to the front door and stood just outside with the cool air from the lake fanning his face.

His sharp ears picked up the sound of footsteps in the darkness beyond the porch rail. He turned his head and saw Midge walking across the yard. Silently the Blue Streak faded into the shadows and followed the huge hunchback. Midge had his arm in a sling and his head was thrust forward as he moved along. He entered a clump of bushes behind the house and was quickly lost to sight in the dense

foliage.

The Blue Streak moved into the bushes carefully. He passed through them and came to a high wall which had been built to hold back rocks and boulders which broke loose from the rims above and slid down the steep cliff face. He saw nothing of Midge, nor could he discover where or how the fellow had been able to vanish so completely right before his eyes.

After a quick search all around the wall he returned to the house. Doctor Medusa was seated by the fire with Della. He got to his feet and crossed the room to meet the Blue Streak.

"We might talk business now," he said.

"Certainly." The Blue Streak was glad of a chance to escape. He saw Bess heading his way and he'd had enough dancing for the evening.

Luggar crossed the room with her. He smiled at the Blue Streak.

"We'll have a bit of a business talk in my library," he said. "If you have those bonds with you I'll pay you for them."

The Blue Streak continued to smile, but back of the smile his mind was working rapidly. Here was something which might trap him and keep him from finding out what he wanted to know. He hadn't taken any bonds from Gibbs. If Gibbs was delivering bonds he must have taken them back

to the hospital with him.

"Come this way," Luggar said. He turned to Bess and the others. "If you'll just excuse us for a half hour?" He smiled and patted Bess's hand. Then he turned and walked toward a side door.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A SILVER BULLET

The Blue Streak sat in Luggar's library with the count and Doctor Medusa seated across the table from him. Luggar brought a metal box from a wall safe.

"I believe the amount was five hundred thousand dollars," Luggar said as he opened the box, revealing bundles of bills of large denomination.

The Blue Streak nodded. He was aware that Doctor Medusa was watching him keenly, and knew one false move or word would rouse the doctor's suspicions.

"If you have the bonds we will check them over." Luggar smiled. "Just a business formality, you know."

The Blue Streak did some fast thinking. The bonds had not been in Gibbs's suitcase. They must be in his car, since they had not been on his person. He sincerely hoped that this was the case.

"I'll go to the car for them," he said.

When Luggar started to get to his feet the "bond salesman" smiled. "Just sit still, I'll be back in a few minutes," he said.

Luggar nodded and leaned back. The Blue

Streak left the library and hurried to the garage. It was still lighted and Alan Gibbs's coupé was still parked near the steps leading down from the house. He moved to the car and opened the battered door. A glance inside showed him that the only place a package or case could be hidden was in the glove compartment. He found it locked, but the ignition key, which he had left in the switch, unlocked it. Inside he found a leather case. A quick look revealed the bonds with a receipt form and a list of the securities Gibbs was delivering.

"Alan Gibbs would have taken that to his room at once," he muttered. "If anyone poked around this car they'd wonder why I left so valuable a package here."

Taking the case he returned to the study. He approached the closed door noiselessly and stood listening. Medusa was talking to Luggar in a low voice. The Blue Streak's sensitive ears picked up the words.

"We have done so well that I may take the final step any day now. Be prepared to come at once when I summon you."

Luggar's voice sounded nervous as he answered. "Hundreds of prominent people disappearing all at once will bring the police down on us in droves, boss."

Medusa laughed. "Have no fear, Count. My plan

is so perfect they will be baffled. This will go down in history as an unsolved mystery. A hundred people vanish and are never found."

"I hope you are right," Luggar said. "But I sure wish you'd change your mind about Bess."

"No. She would be a troublemaker. She must die along with the others." Medusa's voice was hard. Suddenly he laughed. "Now order some fine brandy and we will drink with Mr. Gibbs. He deserves a toast for delivering those bonds."

The Blue Streak waited a minute, then opened the door after shuffling his feet and making some noise outside. He entered and smilingly seated himself.

"I hope you will not report my carelessness to the city office. Fact is, I left those bonds in my car." He smiled as he opened the case. "I have a list of the securities here. Five hundred thousand in negotiable bonds. And here is a receipt form." He shoved the papers across to Luggar, keeping the pile of bonds in his hand.

"The safest place is always the place where no one would expect valuables to be left," Doctor Medusa said. "Anyone wishing to steal them would have looked in your room for those bonds."

"Quite true," Luggar agreed. He was eagerly scanning the list of bonds. He finally shoved it across to Medusa. "What do you think of my in-

vestment, Doctor?" he asked.

Medusa examined the list and nodded his approval. "Very sound investment, I suspect, though I am not yet familiar with American securities."

The Blue Streak wanted to laugh at this little play. He was sure Medusa knew and had chosen every security on that list. Luggar was counting out piles of bills and shoving them across to him. He scrawled Alan Gibbs's name on the receipt and passed it over to Luggar as the last bundle of bills was laid before him.

"I would not feel too safe with so much cash on my person or in my room," Doctor Medusa said smilingly. "Are you sure all of your servants are above suspicion, Count?"

"I have never had any trouble with them, but some have been hired recently," Luggar answered smoothly.

"Perhaps I might leave the money in your wall safe until I am ready to go back to the city?" the Blue Streak suggested.

"I'll be glad to lock it up for you," Luggar answered.

At that moment the door opened and Bess came in followed by several of the guests. Her eyes dropped for a moment to the piles of currency and opened wide, then she cried excitedly, "Hurry! Come out on the porch. There is the most won-

derful display of northern lights over the lake."

"They are great," one of the men agreed. He seemed embarrassed at having broken into a business conference.

"We'll go at once and have a look at them," Doctor Medusa said.

Luggar glanced at the money. "Shall I lock it up now?" he asked.

"If you don't mind I'll just check the amount," the Blue Streak said gravely. "Just a matter of formality but a rule the office is very strict about. I'll be out in a few minutes." He began breaking the seals on the packages of bills.

Luggar got up and put the bonds into the wall safe. He twirled the dial and went out with the others, leaving the Blue Streak at the table.

As they moved out Luggar and Doctor Medusa kept well back. Luggar spoke to the mastermind in a low voice.

"He stepped right into our trap."

"A very trusting young man," Medusa agreed. "Use a silver bullet tomorrow. It would be too bad to spoil so fine a statue."

Bess and the guests were exclaiming over the play of lights in the sky above the mountains. Medusa and Luggar joined them. Five minutes later the Blue Streak appeared with the leather case in his hands.

"A magnificent display of heavenly phenomena, Mr. Gibbs," Doctor Medusa said.

"Isn't it swell?" Bess had moved close to the Blue Streak. "It would be wonderful to watch it from a canoe on the lake, Alan."

The Blue Streak grinned down at her. At the moment it did not seem she could be a headstrong and spoiled young woman. She was as flushed and eager as any little girl. Luggar moved over to her side.

"As soon as I lock up Mr. Gibbs's valuable package I'll take you out on the lake, Bess," he said with an ingratiating smile.

"That is very good of you," the Blue Streak said. "I have a little business to talk over with Doctor Medusa."

Bess was clearly disappointed. Her eyes flashed and she tossed her head.

"O.K., if that's the way you feel about it. Hurry up, Count, the lights may fade out any minute. I'll get a wrap." She turned and walked inside the house.

Luggar hurried into the library with the Blue Streak. He stuffed the leather case into the wall safe and turned away quickly. The Blue Streak smiled.

"Have a nice boat ride," he said.

Luggar gave him a sour glance. "I will," he said.

Doctor Medusa came in and seated himself. He poured brandy for himself and the Blue Streak. The Blue Streak shook his head.

"None for me, thanks," he said. "I like a clear head when I talk business."

CHAPTER EIGHT

AMBUSH

Early the next morning the Blue Streak was up and off for a stroll around the grounds. The guests and the servants were all asleep, but the black sedan was gone from the garage. The Blue Streak made a careful check of the grounds. He was unable to forget the fantastic idea Medusa had planted in his mind. The doctor planned mass murder as a part of some grand scheme he was working out. It seemed clear he had already destroyed a number of victims who had never had any inkling of impending doom. What on earth could be the monstrous plot worked out so carefully in the mind of the fabulous doctor? "Alan Gibbs" knew that he faced a difficult task, and one in which he must match wits with a wily and wicked criminal. What plan was this which had been formed by the doctor's perverted brain?

The grounds about him were those of a comfortable mountain place which would offer pleasant relaxation and play for almost any sort of person. There was golfing, swimming, fishing, riding, tennis, and inside there was plenty of room for dancing or lounging. It would be easy to get guests to come

to Count Luggar's secluded place for a week end. No doubt invitations were eagerly sought.

Standing on a ledge overlooking the grounds the Blue Streak saw that the towering walls of Death's Head, the highest peak in the Skeleton Range, rose almost above the lake and the buildings. The retaining wall where Midge had vanished the night before had been built to protect the grounds and house from rocks loosened from the steep cliffs. Many boulders lay piled against the wall.

Turning around, he looked down the canyon and saw that the road entered the valley through a natural gateway of rock. At one side of this narrow cut rose a balancing rock. Wind and rain had cut away the lower strata until the huge rock, a small peak in itself, stood like an inverted bottle. The Blue Streak squinted at the balancing rock. A charge of dynamite in the narrow neck would bring the mass of rock down into the cut, closing it forever. He wondered if this might not be part of the doctor's scheme. Surely it would be an ingenious method of keeping a fantastic secret.

Moving down the road a half mile he paused and listened. A familiar whistle came to him from a side canyon. Turning that way, he came upon Hank seated on a boulder. Hank jumped to his feet.

"Any action? Did you clean up?" he asked, his voice quickening in eagerness.

"No," the Blue Streak answered. "But things are coming to a head." He grinned at Hank. "You haven't missed a thing except some expert jitter-bugging."

"Say, boss, I'm the best jitterbug dancer in this state. I'd sure like to go in with you." Hank sighed mournfully.

"I have a job for you." The Blue Streak took a package from his pocket. "There are five hundred thousand dollars in bills in that package. Deliver it to the address on the wrapper."

Hank's eyes bugged out. "Did you get into a poker game and clean them out?"

The Blue Streak laughed. "No. The money isn't mine. How did Gibbs make out?"

"He'll be asleep until later in the day. Bad shock. Three ribs broken and some internal injuries."

"If you see him and he is awake tell him I delivered his bonds and sent the money to his company."

"They paid you that much money? Can't be crooks after all." Hank was plainly disappointed.

"They planned to keep the bonds and the money, too, but I played a trick on them. They got a package of envelopes instead of the money." The Blue Streak chuckled as he recalled how, while Luggar and Medusa were out looking at the northern lights, he had switched the bills for envelopes from Lug-

gar's desk.

"Want me to come back up here, boss?" Hank asked.

"Yes, be here tonight."

"The car is in that grove a hundred yards on up this gulch. I had to move a lot of rocks to get her in there. I put some of 'em back into place so no one would think a car had come up here." Hank was proud of his job in hiding the car.

"Excellent work," the Blue Streak said. "Now I have to be off. I have a hunch I'll be expected to go for a hike or a ride today."

"A trap?" Hank asked with a grin.

"Exactly, only the animal is wise in this case." He grinned back at Hank.

"I'd like to be around when they close in," Hank said. "They'll sure be surprised birds."

The Blue Streak hurried back up the road and across the grounds to the buildings. The guests were up and eager to be off for a day of fun. Lugger was seeing that everyone got started on whatever sport was desired.

As the Blue Streak strolled up he said, "Fine morning, Mr. Gibbs. Bess is having her breakfast. You are to ride the breaks above camp with her today." He smiled broadly. "She's expecting you to join her at breakfast."

The Blue Streak nodded and walked toward the

house. Bess waved gaily to him from the breakfast room. She certainly was an unsuspecting victim, and he had a hunch that today was set for an attempt to get her fortune and perhaps her life. He nodded gravely and seated himself at the table beside her.

"Did you know we were going exploring, just we two?" she asked.

"So I hear," the Blue Streak said, and smiled at her.

"Don't try to run out on me. There'll be no business conferences today," she warned. "I mean to have a lovely day."

"I won't run out on you today," he said with a touch of grinness.

Bess laughed softly and when the Blue Streak looked inquiringly at her she explained.

"Uncle John tried to get me to let a sort of superman tag around with me to protect me while I was up here. Wasn't that silly? In the first place the fellow was a dumb bunny who thought everyone was a criminal or a wolf about to eat up little girls."

"What happened to this superman?" the Blue Streak asked with a twinkle in his eye.

"I sent him on his way," Bess said.

"Tell me something about your uncle," the "dumb bunny" urged.

Bess's smile faded. "Uncle John had an accident and is in bed resting. I'll go in tomorrow and see him. Doctor Medusa says he is doing well but needs complete quiet." Her smile broke again. "He knows that every time we get together we have a fight over something. That's the way we show how much we love each other."

The Blue Streak grinned in spite of himself. "Clash of two strong wills, I reckon," he said understandingly.

She nodded, then bent forward. "You do business with Doctor Medusa and Count Luggar. Don't you find them perfectly honest and entirely trustworthy?"

The Blue Streak ceased smiling. He regarded her gravely. This was no time to upset his plans by telling her they were both criminals and murderers. She just would not believe him.

"Alan Gibbs is an expert on investments," he said. "Why not let me look over any investments you might be making with them?"

"Oh, I'm not investing with them," Bess said. "Count Luggar wouldn't let me put any money into his developments."

The Blue Streak was taken aback and said nothing. This was a new angle. It meant the crooks had figured out some other way to get their hands on her huge fortune.

"I thought you were engaged to Count Luggar," he said teasingly. "What will he think of me, riding with you?"

Bess laughed and shook her curls. "That was part of my scrap with Uncle John. I told him and all his friends that I was engaged to the count. It made Uncle John furious."

"Your friends think you are engaged to him?" the Blue Streak asked.

Bess giggled. "Sure," she said. "That was the only way I could really fool Uncle John; he's pretty smart."

This information stuck in the Blue Streak's mind, and he knew he would find a place for it in the puzzle he was piecing together.

While Bess and the Blue Streak were finishing their leisurely breakfast new guests arrived at the resort. Joe Gort with his girl, Mamie Smith, and Louie with a girl called Baby Face got out of the now familiar black sedan. They were followed by Della and Doctor Medusa. The doctor was calling in his killers for the final big scene.

The Blue Streak watched the new guests from the breakfast-room window. He knew at once that these pale-faced, dissipated appearing people were not society folk out for a week end. They were criminals on the prowl. Bess did not seem to notice anything different about them. She was eager to be

in the saddle and off. The Blue Streak would have preferred to stay but he knew that at any hour now Luggar might look inside the leather case he had left in the safe. That would mean action, and he had no foundation for action, because he had no evidence. To desert Bess now might well mean her end.

In the library Medusa was having a brief conference with his crew. He was explaining a part of his plans.

"The Marigold girl has announced she is engaged to Luggar. After she meets with an accident on the trail today, we will discover a will among her belongings. It will be witnessed by reliable parties." Medusa smiled at Joe and Mamie. "You are the witnesses. It is quite natural that a girl should leave her fortune to the man she loves and plans to marry."

His crew nodded their heads. Luggar said, "Thought you wanted her for a statue. Her uncle will claim her."

"Her uncle will be too ill even to go to a funeral," Medusa answered. "She will make a beautiful statue."

"You say this fellow Gibbs slipped one over on Midge," Joe asked. "I didn't think he had that much strength."

"You underestimated him badly, Joe," Medusa said. "In a few minutes you can look him over and see that Midge didn't harm him any. Luggar is doing that for me along the trail above the lake."

"Alan must have pepped up," Mamie said. "I'll go in with you, Joe, and feel his muscle." She giggled but a sharp look from Joe quieted her.

"That is about all, except that you will work at this end from now on. We'll be having plenty of guests." Medusa got to his feet.

"I'm hungry," Mamie said.

"Me, too," Baby Face broke in.

"Breakfast is being served in the front dining-room," Medusa said. "You'll be able to eat with Bess Marigold and Mr. Gibbs."

The four got up and headed for the door, chatting nervously. Joe fished out a cigar as soon as he was out of the library and away from Medusa.

In the breakfast room the Blue Streak was waiting for Bess to finish her coffee. When she finally pushed back her cup he arose to pull back her chair. As he did so he heard a high feminine voice say, "Oh, look, Joe, there's Alan now. Let's sit over there, shall we?"

Instantly his brain clicked. He caught Bess by the arm and shoved her through the French doors leading to the porch.

"Race you to the stables!" he called, giving her

a shove.

They ran down the steps and away toward the barns. Joe and Mamie stared after them.

"Looks like the mountain air put a lot of new pep into Alan," Mamie said.

Joe stared after the running couple. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah. Looks like he'd put on some weight, too."

The Blue Streak ducked into the stable. He had another piece of the puzzle fitted into place, another set of the plotters spotted. But he had barely missed being declared an impostor. Gibbs had told him Joe Gort and Mamie Smith were the friends who had helped him make the business deal, and had secured his invitation for a week end with Count Luggar.

"I forgot my compact on the breakfast table," Bess said breathlessly. "Would you get it for me, please, Alan?"

"Certainly," the Blue Streak said evenly. "I'll get a slicker from my room while I'm at the house. Showers come quickly in the mountains."

He walked to the house and entered through the garage. In a few minutes he came out of his room wearing a checkered shirt he had found among Gibbs's things. He had a slicker rolled under his arm. Walking down the stairs he entered the breakfast room. Louie, Baby Face and Mamie were

laughing over a joke Louie had just told. Joe was drinking coffee laced with brandy and scowling at his cup.

"Morning, folks," the Blue Streak greeted them.

Mamie shot him a quick look and her brows drew down. "For a minute I thought it was Alan, but he just dashed off to the barn."

The Blue Streak moved to the table where Bess had been scated. "Look at the riffle on that lake. Boy, I'll sure have some swell fly fishing today," he said happily.

Everyone looked except Joe, who continued to scowl at his cup. Deftly the Blue Streak picked up the compact and turned away.

"I thought my partner might be in here. Guess she's gone." He bowed toward the ladies and left the room. Joe's voice followed him.

"Different shirt, but I'd swear it's the same pants."

Mamie's laugh floated out. "You're always seein' things, Joe. Cheer up. This is a vacation we're on. Why don't you relax?"

"Yeah," Joe answered. "A vacation."

The Blue Streak moved on to the barn. He handed Bess her compact and helped her adjust her stirrups. They were to ride stock saddles in true Western fashion, and Bess was excited because her horse seemed a bit wild.

"Think he'll buck?" she asked.

The stableman answered her. "No, miss, he won't buck."

They mounted and the Blue Streak took the lead around the grounds to the spot where the stableman had said they would find the trail.

"It goes to the top of Superstition Peak, Count Luggar says. But he made me promise we wouldn't try for the top."

"The stableman says it is a dangerous trail," the Blue Streak said.

"I like things dangerous and exciting," Bess answered, and spurred her horse to a gallop, disregarding the narrowness of the bridle path around the lake.

The Blue Streak set his spurs and sent his horse thundering after her. When he finally came up with her he leaned over and shouted, "You'll break that pretty neck of yours, sis."

Bess flushed and for once she did not look at him with the reckless sparkle in her eyes. They rode on around the lake and found the trail leading into the wilderness. It was little more than a deer trail, but it was blazed and could easily be followed.

They rode on steadily until the Blue Streak called a halt. He pulled up on a bank above a little beaver lake. They were high above the little valley now

and the air was light and cool.

"Time to look into the lunch packet the cook sent along," he called.

Before he could leap to the ground and extend a hand, Bess had dismounted and was standing at her horse's head. The Blue Streak took a deep breath of the pure air. He looked up the slope and smiled. They were hedged in by dense second-growth spruce and pale green aspens. In this peaceful place it did not seem possible that sinister forces might be lurking in the dense cover, but he took no chances. He seated Bess near the bank of the beaver pond where she was sheltered from above.

Bess unpacked the lunch and set it out. The Blue Streak was reaching for a sandwich when his sharp ears caught the snapping of a twig in the underbrush, then the metallic click of a gun hammer being eased backward. With one powerful thrust he sent Bess rolling down the bank. She landed in the beaver lake with a splash and came up sputtering angrily. Whirling back, the Blue Streak heard two rifle shots as one bullet smashed against his left side like the blow of a pile driver, its force hurling him backward almost into the pond. The other bullet screamed through the air where Bess had been sitting.

For a second the Blue Streak struggled to regain his balance. A ragged hole in his shirt revealed the

brown covering of his bullet-proof vest. He had slipped it on under his shirt. He leaned forward and leaped toward the clump of aspens from which the shots had come. Behind him he saw Bess climbing up the bank and shouted to her, "Stay down! It's you they're after!"

Two more shots rang out from the bushes but the bullets went wild because the Blue Streak was leaping forward at incredible speed. Fast as he was, he failed to lay hands on their assailants. He caught a glimpse of two men leaping over a steep bank into a deep crevice. He halted and stood for a moment listening. He had to be sure Bess would not be attacked from the trail below. It seemed a certainty that the killers must have come up the trail he and Bess had followed. He had seen no other pathway.

"Don't go after them!" Bess shouted. "You don't have a gun!"

He walked back and stood beside her. Bess was staring at him wide-eyed. Suddenly she began to laugh.

"Alan Gibbs, you are the Blue Streak," she said accusingly.

He grinned at her. "I am," he admitted. "But how did you guess?"

"That first bullet hit you and bounced off. Then you crossed that clearing in exactly six leaps." She

laid a hand on his arm. "I guess I need your protection. For once I'm really scared."

"You do, more than you realize," he said seriously.

"I saw one of the men," she said, and her eyes began to flash. "It was Count Luggar. He tossed his rifle into that bush." She pointed to a clump of bushes. "Get it and we'll be armed."

"I never use a gun," he said gravely. "I have my own weapons." He smiled at her. "Mind if I get into my regular togs? They are designed to give me protection and to allow me freedom of action at the same time."

"Go ahead," she said.

"Then we'll eat. I'm hungry." He laughed softly.

Within five minutes the Blue Streak was back. He located Bess in a sheltered spot and they sat down to eat. As they munched their sandwiches he asked questions.

"While at the lodge did you sign any papers?"

"No," she said thoughtfully. "Yes, I did, too. I signed Count Luggar's fancy guest register."

"I'll bet you signed your will," the Blue Streak said grimly.

"Will?" Bess exclaimed.

"Certainly. You told everyone you were engaged to Count Luggar. What would be more natural than for you to make a will in his favor?"

"That would be vile," Bess said feelingly.

"We are up against a clever and dangerous ring of criminals," the Blue Streak said gravely. "Doctor Medusa is the mastermind, I'm convinced of that." He tossed a pebble into the beaver lake and watched the circle of ripples widen. "I could go down and smash their whole gang, but we have several things to worry about."

"What?" Bess asked.

"We must find out about your uncle. You would be wise to get another doctor."

"Do you think anything has happened to him?" Bess asked.

"Medusa may have made off with him in order to force him to sign something. He failed once but he may have other plans, just as he changed his plans about you."

"If he's taken Uncle John I'll find him," Bess said grimly. "And I'll make Medusa and Luggar pay for this."

"We will," the Blue Streak said. Then he added, "But we have to get you out of here and down to where my car is hidden. I guess that will mean waiting until dark. They'd ambush us if we went in now." He looked at her thoughtfully. "Think you can hike part way back?"

"Sure," Bess said.

"I can carry you if you can't," he said with a

grin.

"I'd like that, but I can hike it," Bess answered.

"Only part way. Now here is the plan. We'll turn the horses loose and head them down the trail. When they reach the lodge with empty saddles Medusa and Luggar may think we were hit. I'm sure Luggar knew he hit me. He may think I finally went down."

"Worth trying," Bess said.

"We'll lie low in the woods and wait for darkness."

"We'll never follow that trail after dark," Bess said.

"*You* couldn't and they will think no one could. But it happens that with these lenses I wear I can see the trail," the Blue Streak said.

"I keep forgetting you are a superman," Bess said.

The Blue Streak got to his feet and went to head the horses back down the trail. He knew he was still far from a solution of the riddle. He had made a start and had saved Bess, but he had no proof against Medusa, and very slim court evidence against Luggar. He had to get to the bottom of the whole master plan before he struck. Unfortunately, he had come into the case late. Events were moving on their way to fruition of the evil doctor's plan when the Blue Streak was consulted. Surely,

too, Medusa's plans had been well and cunningly laid, so that it would take clever strategy to unearth his secret. The Blue Streak was sure the master-mind's plan was diabolical and had already resulted in more than one murder. He knew, too, that having gained so much, Dr. Medusa would not give up easily. He did not feel nearly as confident as he had led Bess to believe, although he knew that, given a little more time, he would be able to strike successfully.

CHAPTER NINE

THROUGH THE CAVERN

Luggar and Midge did not pause to check up on their bullets when they saw the Blue Streak charging their hiding place. They dived into a deep crevice, followed it for a hundred yards, then slipped into a hidden entrance under a great rock. From this entrance they descended a ladder which they hoisted up with a rope from below. Reaching a tunnel fifty feet underground they lowered the ladder and flashed on their electric lanterns.

"I got the gal," Midge said. "Saw her flop back into that pond."

"I didn't miss Gibbs's heart by over three inches," Luggar said. "But he acted like a grizzly bear. Got clear across that open meadow before he went down. Grizzlies charge like that after you give them a heart shot."

"Are you sure you got him?" Midge asked nervously. "He's mighty tough, you know. He can stand more than any other man I ever saw."

"I got him," Luggar said. "Right through the heart."

"He was coming after us mighty spry," Midge said doubtfully.

"Tomorrow we'll ride up that way and pick them both up. You'll see. Their horses will wander in tonight." Luggar was so sure of his prowess with a rifle that he refused to believe his victim could be alive. He sincerely believed that the Blue Streak's leap had been like the death charge of a fatally wounded grizzly. For he knew his bullet had come near the heart of his victim—hadn't he seen it speed to its mark? He felt secure in the belief that after his short dash "Alan Gibbs" had fallen, and was now safely dead, no longer a danger to any of them. Bess, too, had fallen under Midge's fire. No, not the slightest doubt of his own success marred Luggar's security. They had done the doctor's bidding and could be confident of his pleasure. *That was Luggar's thought.*

The tunnel they were following began to widen until they came out in a great cavern of limestone formation. Crystal forms gleamed on every side. At last a glow of light showed ahead and they approached a larger cavern. It was lighted with great arc lights, and men were moving about like ghostly things. Houses and sheds and walls of stone rose from the floor. Here under the mountain stood a village of crystal and gray buildings. The sight was common to Luggar and Midge. They paid no attention to the strangely silent men who moved about the silent passageways between the cheerless

buildings.

Passing above the village they entered another wide tunnel and after walking a half mile they came to a blank wall. Luggar found a switch and threw it into place. After a bit the wall opened and they passed through. A man outside the gate nodded to them as he pressed a lever and closed the entrance again. They were known here and were allowed to pass freely.

Luggar breathed deeply.

"I always feel better when I get out of there," he said.

"Them fellers don't seem to mind it," Midge answered, motioning backward toward the wraithlike men they had left behind.

"They don't dare show their faces above ground, any of 'em," Luggar said. "If you had a murder rap hanging over you you'd be glad to stay down there, too."

Luggar spoke slowly.

"Mebbe we'll all have to go underground into Doc's world," Midge said. "We got plenty of murders against us. We might have to go in hiding for a while."

"We won't have them pinned onto us," Luggar said.

"You sure don't talk like no count when you get away from that palace," Midge said. He grinned

slyly.

Luggar laughed. He had paused before another stone door and was pressing a button. The door opened and they entered Doctor Medusa's laboratory. The doctor was seated at his table. He had an intricate instrument before him and was intent upon its dials. Luggar and Midge stood waiting for him to acknowledge their presence. Finally he leaned back in his chair and looked at them questioningly.

"Well?" he demanded. "What do you want? Why are you here?"

"We're on our way back to the lodge to organize a searching party when two horses come down the trail with empty saddles," Luggar said with a crafty smile.

"We made it away fast like you said, boss," Midge added.

"We have to be able to explain your absence at the lodge. The stableman can say you took no horses to ride up the trail." Medusa smiled at his plan's success.

"And nobody else knows of any other way of getting up there except by the trail," Luggar said. "I was out fishing in the stream below the lake. I'll slip down there and come in with my creel and pole."

"I been working up in the timber, not that any-

body will ask," Midge said.

"Because of the will which must be presented in court there must be a perfect alibi for each of us," Medusa said.

"How about old man Marigold? What will he do?" Luggar asked.

"He got so troublesome I finally brought him here. He's in the Silent City right now," Medusa said.

"Won't that cause trouble?" Luggar asked. "He's a mighty well-known and rich man. Won't he be missed and won't someone look for him?"

"I have had him removed to a sanitarium. They will report him there and he will be there when they finally force me to produce him." Medusa spoke slowly.

"But he'll see the Silent City," Midge broke in protestingly.

"You should listen and not talk, Midge," Medusa said. "You have few brains. You don't understand these things."

"Yeah, that's so," Midge agreed with a shake of his large head.

"I treated his eyes with a powerful drug. He will see nothing." Medusa regarded Luggar thoughtfully. "I had to be sure he was safe. The Blue Streak is interested in Marigold and that boy is very clever. Ordinary walls and doors do not seem to

keep him out. But I fancy he won't be able to move a mountain."

He laughed softly.

Luggar joined his laugh.

"If he shows up around the lodge I'm going underground for a spell in the Silent City myself," he said.

"Perhaps we all will, along with many guests," Medusa said. "Now be gone. I am working upon an interesting experiment."

Two hours later Luggar came plodding up to the lodge with a creel over his shoulder and a fly rod in his hands. His waders were wet from the stream and his hat band was well filled with damp flies. He made sure at least four guests saw him come in from his fictitious fishing trip.

The stableman saw him and came running. "Those two saddle horses we sent out with the young man and woman," he began excitedly.

"What about them?" Luggar said loudly, so that all might hear.

"They came in with empty saddles a half-hour ago," the stableman said.

The guests all heard and crowded around. Luggar dropped his creel and rod. He acted the part of a surprised friend very well.

"This is bad," he said. "There is a party of hunters up there. They may have been accidentally shot or

they may be lost. Perhaps we should form a party and go to look for them at once."

"Pretty late to tackle that trail," the stableman said.

He was a local man and knew the dangers of the dim trails at night.

"Nevertheless we have to do something! We have to find her! If anything has happened to her I'll—I'll shoot myself."

Luggar appeared to be losing control of himself at the thought of Bess's danger.

"There, there, steady now, old man," one of the guests said. "We'll organize a searching party and head right out."

"What are you waiting for! Get horses!" Luggar shouted at the stableman.

Sinking down upon the porch steps, the count buried his face in his hands. Mamie and Baby Face had come out. Mamie dropped down beside him and slipped an arm around him as though consoling him.

She whispered in his ear, "Good show, you big bum."

The stableman got horses and went along as a guide. Luggar rode ahead at a reckless pace which was really dangerous. He meant to have his alibi airtight.

Back at the lodge Baby Face and Mamie were

telling the other girls what a devoted lover Luggar was and how much Bess cared for him. The other girls soon began to think Bess had really cared a lot for the Count.

CHAPTER TEN

MOUNTAIN HIDEOUT

The Blue Streak and Bess sat for a time screened by the bushes on the mountain side. They could watch the trail below and see the lake lying like a blue meadow. The buildings of the lodge could be located by a spiral of dark smoke rising straight into the sky.

"I wish we could be doing something," Bess said impatiently.

"We might be able to learn something if you feel like doing a bit of climbing," the Blue Streak answered.

"Anything would be better than just sitting here," Bess said.

Now that she realized into what a frightening mess she had plunged herself and her uncle, with her unreasoning disregard of his warnings, Bess was suffering remorse along with her fear. And, indeed, she was afraid. Although headstrong and arrogant, Bess was in reality a brave girl. Yet as she dwelt upon the danger which lay with her former friends she could scarcely suppress an actual shiver. How utterly sinister and horrible Count Luggar appeared to her, now that she viewed him as he really was!

Nevertheless, she put on a brave face for the Blue Streak, and he could only guess at her fear. Outwardly she maintained a calm, shattered only at infrequent intervals, although now the waiting and the wondering were definitely getting on her nerves. She wanted some sort of action.

"We have to be back here just before dark," the Blue Streak said thoughtfully. "I'd like to poke around a bit up here. This mountain is supposed to be honeycombed with caves, and there are strange stories told of what a man can find underground."

"One of the mountaineers who works at the lodge told me a tale about people living under the mountain in a world of darkness." Bess laughed. "He had never really seen any of them, but a friend of his saw a party of ghostly men in a cavern while exploring."

"In a dark cavern a man's imagination works very well," the Blue Streak grinned. He got to his feet. "We might poke about a bit. We may see some of these odd people."

"I don't care to meet any of them," Bess said with a shudder.

"I wouldn't worry too much," the Blue Streak said with a grin.

They climbed up along a narrow ledge, and around the shoulder of a cliff. The trail led them

above the spot where their assailants had vanished from sight a few hours earlier. The Blue Streak paused on a jutting lip of rock, and stood for some time studying the country which lay below and above them.

"I think I've spotted a sort of trail in that gulch down there," he said.

Bess looked but saw nothing but a canyon with red and yellow walls and an open meadow filled with red rocks.

"We'll go down and have a look." The Blue Streak caught her hand and helped her down off the ledge.

They moved into a dense thicket of squawberry bushes and blueberry shrubbery. From the thicket they emerged into a field piled high with huge, red rocks. Suddenly Bess caught his arm, stifling a scream.

The Blue Streak whirled as a cracking of brush sounded on their right. Then a big, black bear broke cover and went galloping across the meadow, dodging around the red rocks and smashing down the bushes growing between them. In his mouth he still held a branch of a blueberry bush. He had been stuffing himself on the ripe fruit.

"I'm glad he's going in that direction," Bess said weakly.

The Blue Streak laughed. "He's as scared of us as we are of him."

"If I was as big as he is I wouldn't be scared of anything," Bess said as she joined the Blue Streak's laugh.

"Know what this reminds me of?" he asked.

"No. What?"

"It looks as if a party of giants had been having a game of tossing rocks at each other."

Bess laughed. That was just the way the field looked, like a spot where giants had been at play, tossing about rocks as big as houses, and leaving them where they fell.

The Blue Streak led Bess through the tangle to a spot where a wide avenue of solid rock shoved up through the vegetation. It formed a sort of highway leading toward the rocky face of a high cliff.

"Is this your trail?" Bess asked.

"It's really a paved highway," he said.

"It surely is," Bess agreed.

Reaching the cliff, they halted. It seemed their trail was a blind lead.

"We certainly got fooled," Bess said with a deep sigh. "Now we shall just have to climb back out of here."

The Blue Streak stepped forward and chuckled softly.

"Here's something," he said.

Bess stepped to his side and saw that a great

slab of rock from the wall had slid downward and outward opening a narrow passageway into the cliff face. The opening was barely wide enough to admit the broad shoulders of the Blue Streak. He had to stoop to enter.

"It's black as a cellar," Bess said as she paused beside him ten feet from the entrance.

"We'll go on and see where this leads us," he said as he caught her hand.

"Lead on," Bess said as she moved closer to the Blue Streak.

By this time his eyes had sharpened and widened so that he could see clearly in the darkness. Picking his way so as to guide Bess over the litter of rocks on the floor, he moved on into the mountain. Between the rocks on the floor lay fine sand which had sifted down from above.

The passageway sloped sharply downward and very soon turned to the left, straight into the mountain. It was no longer a crack, but had widened to a natural tunnel with the ceiling high above their heads.

"What was that noise?" Bess whispered. She had heard a whirring sound mingled with faint squeaks.

"Bats," the Blue Streak answered. He could see big, black fellows hanging head down from the ceiling. Their passage had startled a number of the bats, causing them to take wing and fly blindly

about.

Bending forward he studied a sandy space between two rocks on the floor. He said nothing to Bess but his sharp eyes saw boot marks and at least two imprints of huge, bare feet.

After a bit Bess whispered nervously, "Are you sure we can find our way out of here?" Her voice echoed along the passageway and came back to her.

The Blue Streak smiled. Bess certainly had changed now that she had given herself over to his protection. She was no longer arrogant and independent. She was scared now and admitted it frankly.

"We'll find our way out," he assured her calmly.

Fifty feet on down the passageway they came to a big room. The Blue Streak paused and looked about. There was an arching ceiling some fifty or more feet above. The room was very large, and filled with a gray haze that made seeing to its far wall rather difficult, but there was a luminosity given off by the damp and gleaming pillars of rock near them, which made it possible for Bess to see a little of what this weird underground world looked like.

"A cave!" she gasped. "A cave big enough to hold a village!"

"It is indeed," the Blue Streak answered. "This

mountain really is a mass of caverns. Listen," he added.

They listened and heard the rumbling of running water, not the babble of a brook but the roar of a river.

"We'll go on and have a look," the Blue Streak said.

Bess crowded closer to him. "This place gives me the creeps," she said. "I wouldn't be surprised if we met some of those people the horse wrangler talked about."

"Nor would I," the Blue Streak admitted gravely, remembering the tracks he had seen near the mouth of its cave.

They moved along and the light from the walls helped Bess pick her way. Rounding a row of pillars they came to the river. It looked black and its waters were roaring along swiftly, ugly in their mysterious blackness.

"Such a big river to be hidden under a mountain," Bess said.

"I think it feeds the lake," the Blue Streak said. "There is a big stream running out of the lake but no river running into it that I've seen."

Bess moved forward toward the edge of the river.

"Be careful, the rocks are slippery and damp." The Blue Streak laid a hand on Bess's arm. "I'm

going to leave you here by this big rock while I have a look along the river."

"But I don't want to stay alone," Bess answered quickly.

"It's best. I can see better than you can, and I'll be able to move swiftly. If I have to take you with me I'll be slowed down, and we have to be back on the trail before dark."

"Just the same I'm afraid," Bess said.

"If anything happens just call to me. I'll come at once," the Blue Streak said. He had a definite reason for not wanting to take Bess with him. He had a hunch he might want to plunge into the swirling stream and swim across it.

"I'll stay, but believe me I'll scream if the least thing happens," Bess said.

"Good girl. Scream and I'll come running." The Blue Streak patted her arm, then turned and strode away.

He hurried along the stream eager to learn where it entered the rocky floor. He knew it must leave the cavern by a tunnel. Hurrying along he bent to watch for tracks. He saw none because the floor of the cavern was solid rock.

Soon he reached the lower wall and saw that the river was sucked into a great hole. It swirled in a vortex of rushing water which took the form of a funnel with its center ten feet lower than the

foaming edges. The terrible power of that whirlpool made the Blue Streak frown. No one could use that passage in going down into the mountain. He was bending forward watching the seething water when he heard Bess scream.

Whirling, the Blue Streak bounded toward the spot where he had left the girl. Through the haze he saw her standing beside the big rock, her hands held up before her face as though to ward off a blow. In a moment he was at her side.

"What happened?" he asked.

"I saw them!" Bess whispered hoarsely. "Six of them, marching slowly along the far bank of the river."

"Saw what? Men?"

"They looked like men, shadowy things bending over as though they had heavy packs on their backs." Bess's voice trembled.

The Blue Streak looked across the river. He hated to leave Bess, but this was a chance to solve at least a part of the mystery of the caverns.

"Don't move! Stay right here till I come back. Hide behind this rock." He bit his words off sharply.

"Where are you going?" Bess cried, with terror in her voice.

"I'm crossing the river," the Blue Streak said grimly.

"You'll never make it," said Bess as she caught his arm.

"Stay here," he said sharply as he whirled toward the river. Before she could stop him he had leaped far out.

When his body hit the water he realized the power of the current. There was a terrific undertow from the whirlpool below. Even his powerful strokes seemed weak against the lashing water as it swirled downward. The Blue Streak thought of the whirlpool and stroked harder.

Slowly he moved across the stream, but his progress down toward the sink-hole was swift. The hissing of the vortex filled his ears and made him struggle harder than he had ever fought before. A yard ahead the lip of the funnel lifted a foaming crest. The Blue Streak heaved himself forward. One hand shot out and caught a jutting rock. He felt the pull of the funnel on his boots, then he pulled himself out on a ledge. For a moment he stood dripping and breathing heavily, then he whirled. Someone was moving along a ledge above the pool. He looked up and saw a line of dimly outlined figures walking along.

Instantly the Blue Streak was off. He pulled himself up on the ledge the figures were following and found a narrow path. Plunging ahead he ran after them. The path swerved around a jutting rock.

The Blue Streak leaped around the rock and stood looking along the narrow pathway. There was no one on it.

Slowly he moved forward. It did not seem possible for anyone to vanish so swiftly or so completely. He could see the path for a hundred feet as it curved around above the pool. Carefully he moved forward until he came to a spot where the path broke off. Only a sheer cliff wall faced him for a distance of some twenty feet. The spot where he stood was directly above the swift and deadly whirlpool.

The Blue Streak shook his head. If they were really men they could not have dived into that pool. He looked up at the arching room and suddenly began to smile. A rope dangled from above. Attached to the rope was an iron seat some six feet wide. It resembled a trapeze bar and the Blue Streak knew the men had swung across the break in the trail by hanging on it.

Glancing at his wrist watch, he frowned. He had to choose one course or another. He could swing across and go on, but if he did he would be leaving Bess beyond call and he would also be risking failure to be on the trail at sundown as he had planned.

While he was debating this decision he suddenly noticed that the rope with the swinging bar was

slowly moving upward. Already it was ten feet above his head. Without a moment's delay the Blue Streak leaped upward. His fingers gripped the bar and he hung on. It kept moving upward toward the ceiling, slowly, steadily.

Far below him as he dangled in the air he could see the whirlpool. He could even see the rock with Bess crouching behind it. Looking up he saw something which gave him a cold chill. The rope was sliding into a hole in the ceiling just big enough to admit it. When the knot above the swinging bar reached the hole the rope stopped moving, leaving the Blue Streak dangling a hundred feet above the ledge and the vortex.

The Blue Streak felt foolish as he clung there. There was no telling how long he might have to stay dangling near the roof of the cavern. It might well be a long time. Looking down he wondered what would happen if he swung the short length of trapeze as far out as he could and then let go. With luck he might hit the river a few yards above the pool. But there was an even chance he would make a bull's eye and be sucked into the depths of the mountain to be ground horribly to a million bits.

Never one to hesitate when action had to be taken, the Blue Streak began swinging back and forth. He found that he could touch the roof with

his feet at the end of each swing. That would give him a chance to heave his body outward. He swung far up against the ceiling and drove his knees up against his chest, then hurled himself outward, letting go of the bar as he shot swiftly through the air.

He sailed out in a perfect arc and shot downward. Down, down he went with the swirling river rushing up to meet him. He hit the water, twisted his powerful body, and came up like a leaping salmon. He knew where the shore line was and struck out toward it. He had hit the river a rod above the pool, but the suction of the water even there was powerful.

He battled to within a yard of the rocky edge and there he remained, unable to gain an inch. Suddenly he turned and headed with the current, riding toward the pool. His stroking arms and his head met the crest of foam on the edge of the pool. Around the rim of the vortex he shot and as he came to the spot nearest the shore he struggled with powerful strokes. His strategy worked. The dizzy rush around the pool had given him momentum which carried him to the bank.

Pulling himself out, he shook the water from his hair and filled his lungs with air. Turning, he headed back up the river toward the big rock where he had left Bess.

Reaching the rock he stood staring at it. Bess was not there. Nor could he see her any place. For a moment he stood looking down toward the whirlpool. Bess was a strong swimmer and might have thought she could follow him across the river. He shuddered. Or she might have been taken away by someone.

The Blue Streak turned toward the spot where they had entered the cavern. He called in a low but penetrating voice.

"Bess! Bess!"

No answer came back to him. Breaking into a run he headed across the cavern floor shouting Bess's name.

As he neared the tunnel which they had followed into the cavern, he got a faint answer. Leaping ahead he rushed up the passageway. A hundred feet from the place where they had entered the dark cavern he saw Bess. In a moment he stood facing her.

"Why did you leave the big rock?" he demanded sharply.

She tossed her head and for a moment the old haughtiness flashed in her eyes.

"I'm not used to being parked," she informed him.

"Next time I leave you, you had better stay parked," he said grimly.

"I wanted to watch the fight when you caught up with those horrible men," she said in a less defiant tone.

"I didn't catch up with them," the Blue Streak answered.

"I know. I saw you pulled up to the ceiling." She shuddered. "And when you dived I was sure you had been killed. I guess I lost my head. I just turned and ran for it."

"You kept your bearings pretty well," he said with a grin. "You located the tunnel."

"I don't know how. I just found myself in it and kept going until I had to stop a moment to catch my breath."

The Blue Streak took her hand.

"We have to hurry. Come along. I'll give you a lift," he said.

Hurrying along they came to the opening and stepped out on the rock strip leading into the giant's playground. Crossing the field they started the steep climb up and over the ridge.

When they reached the top the sun was still well above the distant peaks. The Blue Streak faced Bess.

"How about taking a rest here on this log?" he asked.

Bess sank down with a deep sigh.

"I could eat a big steak right now," she answered.

"Couldn't you?"

"With a double order of French fries." The Blue Streak sat beside her.

Bess stared down toward the lake and her smile faded.

"Do you think we will find uncle tonight?" the weary girl inquired.

"If my plans work out we should have you both safe at home tomorrow." The Blue Streak hesitated. "But no matter what happens you are to keep your chin up and go on fighting."

"I'll do that," Bess promised.

"Medusa is no ordinary criminal. This is the toughest job I ever tackled." He paused and laughed shortly. "But I have the edge."

"What edge?" Bess asked.

"Medusa is dealing in crime, and the criminal always has the odds against him," the Blue Streak said grimly. "We'll break up his grand scheme, whatever it is."

"If by any chance we are separated can I go directly to the police and tell them all about you?" Bess asked.

"Certainly. They know me well." The Blue Streak grinned. "Sometimes I irritate the chief by not letting him know my plans."

"That I can believe," Bess said.

The Blue Streak got to his feet.

"Time to move on down the mountain to a spot where we can get a good view of the trail from the lodge."

He led Bess down the mountain until they came to a spot on the slope where there was excellent cover and a clear view of the twisting trail leading up from the lodge.

"This is the spot," the Blue Streak said. "Now all we have to do is to wait."

"I don't like waiting for action to get underway," Bess said.

"You are like Hank. He arms himself with a wrench and sails in. A number of times I have wasted precious minutes fishing him out of trouble. Hank is a wizard with a wrench, that is, when he's working on a plane or a car, but a wrench is not always equal to a tommy gun or an automatic pistol."

The Blue Streak picked up a stone and tossed it down the slope.

"I'm sure I'll like Hank," Bess said.

The Blue Streak did not answer. His eyes were on the trail below. A flaming sunset was plating the Skeleton Mountains with red gold and the sky was a vault of crimson. Below them the lake shimmered in a purple haze which was beginning to fill the deep canyons. Bess did not know it but her impatience was nothing compared to the eagerness for

action which filled the man beside her. No trace of it showed in his face except that his jaw muscles were pulled tight and his eyes had a hard, flinty gleam in them.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE COUNT TALKS

Bess and the Blue Streak were seated on a ledge above the trail waiting for darkness to settle. The Blue Streak had selected a high and jutting point from which they could see far down the slope. The sun was slanting toward the west and the air was growing colder. Bess leaned forward, her chin in her palms.

"You are an extraordinary person," she said thoughtfully.

The Blue Streak leaned back against a tree and said nothing.

Bess went on talking.

"Have you any powers I haven't seen in action as yet?"

The Blue Streak laughed.

"I have perfected the art of ventriloquism to a fair degree," he said.

"Ventriloquism? Are you spoofing me?" the girl inquired.

"No. I found I could use a trick like that once in a while, so I set about learning."

The Blue Streak's eyes were watching on the trail below.

"How about a demonstration right this minute?" Bess asked.

"See that bush down there?"

Bess nodded.

"Well, there is a man down there whose name is Count Luggar. He is very anxious for you to come down."

Bess looked toward the bush clinging to the canyon wall. The voice of Count Luggar came up to her.

"Bess dear, please forgive me for trying to shoot you."

"Wonderful. You not only made the words come from that bush but you imitated the count perfectly," Bess cried.

The Blue Streak leaned forward suddenly. "Look," he said. "There is a searching party on the trail below. Our horses must have reached the lodge."

A string of horses could be seen winding slowly upward.

"It will be dark long before they get here," Bess said.

The Blue Streak's attention was concentrated on the moving riders. To Bess they were so small she could only be sure they were horsemen, but to him they stood out clearly, even their features and coloring being easily discernible to him through the

medium of his extraordinary eyesight. He looked searchingly now at the toy-sized figures moving below them, then shook his head slowly in a sort of wonder.

"Interesting," he muttered. "One of those riders is Count Luggar. Now how do you suppose he got down there?"

"He couldn't be down there. He's still hiding up on the mountain," Bess said.

"You forget that he managed to get above us on the trail without passing us," the Blue Streak said grimly.

"Right," Bess admitted.

She fell silent as her thoughts reverted to her own curious actions during the period immediately preceding and leading up to the predicament in which she now found herself. She marveled again, with an inward shudder, at her own arrogance and stupidity. Now at last Count Luggar had been revealed clearly to her as something loathesome and detestable. How could she ever have been so completely under the spell of his personality? She was intensely ashamed when she thought of the trouble she had caused, not only to her uncle, but to the Blue Streak as well. Still, perhaps it would all be worth while, if they could now bring Count Luggar and his monster mastermind, Dr. Medusa, to justice.

In silence they watched the riders move slowly

up the trail until they disappeared into heavy timber. The Blue Streak got to his feet. The sun was just above a ragged peak and deep shadows were filling the canyons with the deep purple haze of evening.

"Time to start down," he said.

They climbed down to the trail and entered the twilight of the spruce woods. To Bess's eyes there was no trail, but the Blue Streak guided her along the path with ease. They moved swiftly along and as they descended the twilight soon turned to darkness.

After a time Bess began to tire. She fought on bravely and refused to admit she was giving out, but she was not able to hold the pace set by the Blue Streak. He finally halted and put a hand on her arm.

"From here on I'm carrying you in, whether you want it or not," he said.

"I can walk if you go a bit slower," she said with spirit.

"From now on we have to go faster. We have no time to waste," he answered as he caught her up and lifted her to his shoulder as he would have picked up a three-year-old girl. "Hang on tight, this might be a rough ride." Before she could protest any more he started off, striding down the trail swiftly.

For a time Bess said nothing, then she began to laugh.

"Better not make any noise," the Blue Streak warned. "We may come upon the rescue party at any minute."

"I'd like to see myself. I'll bet I look funny," Bess said.

Ten minutes later they came upon the party from the lodge. The men had built a big fire of dead spruce limbs. The flames were leaping up along the cliff wall. The men sat in a circle around the fire while their horses stood with heads down a few rods away, but well inside the circle of light. Luggar was seated on a log at a distance from the others. Midge sat close to the fire, his huge hands extended to the heat.

The Blue Streak moved silently around the camp which was a hundred feet above the trail and close to the cliff. Several of the horses pricked up their ears and one of them whinnied. The stableman jumped to his feet. He quickly caught up a carbine from beside a log and peered into the inky darkness of the night.

"Hosses must smell a mountain lion," he announced to the party.

"Lion?" one of the men asked nervously, drawing nearer to the fire.

"Probably a big tomcat on the prowl," the moun-

tain man answered. "If I get a glimpse of his eyes I'll shoot him."

The Blue Streak circled toward the cliff. Bess wanted to urge him to hurry on down the trail, but she dared make no sound. The horses quieted down when they were satisfied the scent which came to them was man smell and not cat or bear. The Blue Streak edged in closer to the searching party's camp. He pressed a warning hand on Bess's arm as he suddenly halted.

The men around the fire had been talking in low voices. A space of silence settled and suddenly the voice of Luggar began speaking. His voice came clearly, every word distinct, but it was as if he spoke out of his thoughts, thoughts so deep and absorbing that he had forgotten those about him, and in his abstraction spoke aloud.

"If she's dead I'll get her money. I have that all fixed up," he said.

His words startled everyone around the fire. Midge jerked upright and twisted around to face the count.

"Shut up, you fool," he hissed.

Luggar had jumped up from the log. He was staring open-mouthed at the circle of faces turned toward him.

"I didn't say anything," he growled.

"I heard you," Midge said. None of the others

said anything at all, but Luggar knew they had heard his voice.

"She won't be dead," he muttered. "I tell you I'm crazy about the girl!" His voice rose almost to a shout.

"Sit down, Count," one of the guests said in a cold voice. "Don't make it any worse. We all heard what you said. You may have been talking in your sleep, but you spoke, all right."

"Listen, Smith," Luggar snarled. "You keep out of this. I didn't say a word. I'm trying to find Bess so I can marry her. We're engaged."

Bess heard the Blue Streak chuckle as he turned away. Swiftly he strode down the trail. After they were well below the camp he said in a low voice, "Count Luggar will certainly have some explaining to do."

"The faker deserves to get into trouble, but he may try to do something to keep those men from talking," Bess said nervously.

"I intended to force his hand. We'll bring this business to a head as soon as we can," the Blue Streak said grimly. "If we can start suspicion among the guests Doctor Medusa won't be able to get a hundred people up here for the big show which he is planning."

"A hundred?" Bess exclaimed.

"I overheard him tell Luggar he would make

away with a hundred victims in one big killing. I gathered it was to be a sort of climax to some plan he has."

"That is terrible. We'll have to stop him, he must be mad," Bess said with a shudder.

"I'll stop him," the Blue Streak said grimly.

"We will. You have to let me help," Bess said stolidly.

"I'm going to pack you off to a safe place," the Blue Streak said.

"You are not!" Bess was again the independent, reckless young lady he had first met.

"Here's the lodge, we can't waste time arguing. We'll slip through the grounds and into the canyon below. Hank will be waiting down there with my car."

The Blue Streak moved swiftly around the buildings, keeping well back from floodlights. He swung out on the highway and increased his speed. Bess hung on and said nothing. After a while the Blue Streak turned off the road and entered a rocky canyon. He paused and whistled. His call was answered immediately, and a few minutes later Hank appeared.

"That you, boss?" he called cautiously.

"Bess and I," the Blue Streak answered.

Hank moved up to them. He grinned as the Blue Streak set Bess back on her feet. She laughed very

softly.

"Hello, Hank," she said. "Your boss carried me fifteen miles. He certainly makes a fine saddle horse."

"I'd carry you that far meself," Hank answered with a grin. He turned to the Blue Streak and his grin faded. "I stopped by the Marigold place. That feller Stafford is all upset. The Doc packed Marigold off to some sanitarium, and Stafford wasn't told where the joint is."

"They've taken him!" Bess cried. "We have to find him before they kill him."

"We'll find him," the Blue Streak reassured her soothingly.

"Don't know how you'll do it. I checked ambulance stations and cab drivers but didn't learn a thing. I even called every sanitarium in the telephone book but none of 'em has him," Hank said. "I figured I'd better get going on this before I saw you."

"You did the right thing," the Blue Streak said. "You may have saved John Marigold's life."

"Can't we do something? You have to find him." Bess was close to tears.

"You can help if you don't break down and go to pieces," the Blue Streak said.

"I'll snap out of it," Bess said, and her voice stopped trembling. "I'll show those murderers I'm

as hard as they are."

"Good girl," the Blue Streak said. "We'll have to concentrate on a plan. It may be a bit dangerous, but we can't stop to consider that angle."

CHAPTER TWELVE

PLANS CHANGE

The rescue party headed by Luggar returned to the lodge without finding any trace of Bess or her escort. As they rode into the grounds Luggar nodded to Midge. All during the trip back to the lodge his mind had been busy with plans for covering up his bad break up on the mountain. Although he knew that this time there was small chance of saving his own skin if he were found out, he had never yet seen the difficulty from which his fertile mind could not devise an escape. Naturally, the lives and safety of others could not be considered in such a move, but Count Luggar must be saved at all costs. Now he had a plan in mind, but he had to make Midge keep still. This in itself might take some pretty clever talking, he knew. Or, if not *clever* talking, it must carry a threat strong enough to insure Midge's silence. The count was ready to go to any length to make sure that the tale of his stupid remark did not reach the ears of Dr. Medusa. The first step must be to talk to Midge.

"I want a word with you alone as soon as we turn our horses loose," he said in a low voice to him now.

Midge scowled at him. He was stiff and saddle sore from riding. This was the first time he had ever ridden over a hundred yards on a horse, and he was cross and was really suffering from sore muscles.

"You can't shut me up," he growled in an ornery tone of voice.

"I can put a slug between your eyes," Luggar said savagely.

Midge jerked upright, then a groan escaped his lips. "I'll talk to you," he said, and his voice was close to a whine.

After the horses were stabled they walked up to the garage together. Luggar looked around to make sure no one could hear them.

"If you tell Medusa I talked up at that camp I'll kill you." He laid a hand on Midge's shoulder and jerked him around.

"Aw, don't get sore," Midge muttered. "I won't say anything, but them other fellers will probably say plenty."

"I have a plan for taking care of the whole bunch of them," Luggar said. "You just keep your trap closed, and everything will undoubtedly come out O.K."

"You going to bump off every one of them birds that heard you unbutton yer lip up there?" Midge asked.

"They could all get caught in an accident on their way back to town. Joe could handle it for me," Luggar said.

"I ain't in on it," Midge said.

"You just keep your trap shut." Luggar's eyes were hard and glassy. He knew he was in a desperate spot. Medusa's anger would be terrible, and the thought of the punishment he would hand out made the phony count shudder.

"Just a moment, gentlemen." The voice of Doctor Medusa cut through the stillness of the garage, crisp and cold.

Luggar and Midge whirled. Medusa stepped out of his black sedan which was parked in the garage. He fixed Luggar with a steady look from his piercing eyes.

"Now just what was it you talked about before our guests?"

Luggar's face went white.

"I never said a word. I didn't have a thing to do with it," he answered.

Midge shuffled his feet uncertainly.

"What did he say?" Medusa's voice cut like a whiplash.

Midge licked his lips and answered hurriedly, "He up and said that if the gal was dead he had it fixed to get all her money."

Midge was desperately afraid of Count Luggar

and his threats, but that fear was as nothing in comparison with the terror with which he regarded Dr. Medusa. For after all, it was Medusa who was the all-powerful and fearless master of them all. Midge knew that to arouse his anger might easily mean a trip underground—to stay.

"You made a fool remark like that?" Medusa asked.

His lips pulled into a thin line.

"That's what everyone says, but I never opened my mouth," Luggar answered. "I swear I didn't say a word."

"Them fellers has been talkin' about it," Midge added. "I heard 'em."

"You didn't find the bodies of either the girl or Gibbs?" Medusa's voice was ominously cool and level.

"No," Luggar said. "They must have crawled away."

"They are both alive," Medusa said. "You will find them. Finish Gibbs off at once but bring the girl to me. You realize that after making a statement like you made you could not go into court with our will and claim her fortune?"

"We could get rid of the men," Luggar said hopefully.

"We could not," Medusa answered sharply. "Before I got wind of trouble one couple had already

packed and left."

"I told you not to let Smith ride on in ahead," Luggar growled.

"Why didn't you stop him?" Midge retorted sharply.

Medusa looked at Luggar for a full minute. As his eyes bored into the fake count, Luggar's shoulders began to droop, and the affected manner which was an important part of his phony make-up disappeared into thin air.

"You bring the girl to me, alive and unharmed, or you will take her place in the cave of statues. I have her uncle and I can still get her money. I'm giving you twenty-four hours. Get back into those brakes and find her." Medusa turned and walked away.

Midge hurried after him.

Medusa whirled about. "You are in no danger from him," he snapped. "Get out and help round up the girl."

Luggar groaned. He was stiff and sore from riding and did not relish the idea of searching the brakes at the upper end of the trail. But he knew he had to find Bess Marigold if he wished to be alive twenty-four hours later. Although Dr. Medusa had intercepted his plans with his discovery of the secret the count had wished so desperately to conceal, Luggar still hoped to save himself from the fate

so sure to meet those who incurred the wrath of the master.

He did not go at once to the stables for a horse. He went instead to his room where he tried in vain to calm his quaking nerves. As he was pacing back and forth Louie and Baby Face dropped in. Luggar scowled at them but Louie sat down in Luggar's easy chair while Baby Face perched on the arm.

"You sure cleaned out the guests," Louie said with a grin. "The last couple pulled out just as we came upstairs."

"Wasn't my fault," Luggar said. His usual iron control was badly shaken. "But I'll go up there and get the girl." Luggar straightened his shoulders. "I'll rescue her."

"Sure you will," Baby Face said with a low, sly laugh.

"What do you two want, anyway?" Luggar demanded suddenly. "What'd you come up here for?"

"Jest to pay our respects to you in case we don't see you again," Louie said. "You been our boss under Doc Medusa for a long time." Louie grinned maliciously.

"I always treated you right, didn't I?"

"Yeah," Louie answered. "So Baby Face and me want to offer our help." He leaned forward in his chair.

Luggar was quick to show his interest.

"I can use some help right now," he said.

"You get the gal back and you'll get a big slab of cash money out of her, that so?"

"Sure," Luggar agreed. "I have to split it with Doc."

"And with us," Baby Face broke in with a high sharp voice.

"Shut up," Louie snapped. "If you go off up into them mountains you're a dead pigeon." He leaned toward Luggar.

"Why?"

"Because the gal ain't up there."

"How do you know?" Luggar demanded with avid interest.

Louie laughed. "Me and Baby Face went for a stroll up the highway. Baby Face spotted some berries up on a ledge and nothin' would do but I had to do a second-story job and get her some. When I got up there I looked down into a little canyon, and what did I see?" He laughed and slapped his leg. "A car, and there sittin' in the shade beside it was this Bess Marigold and an Irish-lookin' feller."

Luggar leaped up from his chair. "Are you sure?"

"Sure, I know that dame well. Doc had me trail her for two days once. We're really givin' you the break on this. Just fer old time's sake." Louie

grinned.

"You came to me because if you told Doc, all you'd get would be a thank you," Luggar answered. "But I'll split with you."

"Fifty-fifty on what you get?" Louie asked.

"Sure," Luggar agreed. He knew he was getting off very lightly. If he had gone on up into the mountains he would have sealed his own doom. "But if you talk to anyone about seeing her I may not collect a dime."

"We figured it that way so we'll keep mum," Louie said. "Unless you should happen to forget the cut."

"You'll get it," Luggar said. "Now I'd better get up there and bring her in."

"Go up the highway until you come to the first side canyon," Louie said. "The car is hidden in a clump of trees."

"You didn't see anything of Gibbs?" Luggar asked.

"No," Louie said. "The Irisher looked like a cabbie or a mechanic."

Luggar stepped to a chest of drawers. He got out a pair of automatic pistols and a coil of silk rope. Sliding the guns into his side pockets he tucked the rope inside his shirt.

"I'll be seein' you folks," he said as he hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PLANS BACKFIRE

Bess and Hank had kept watch the rest of the night in the Blue Streak's car. The Blue Streak had been prowling around the lodge. He had learned nothing except that the rescue party had not returned from the mountain, and that Doctor Medusa was not at the lodge. He returned to them after making a trip around the lake searching for another trail which might possibly lead up higher into the mountains.

"Am I glad to see you," Bess greeted him. "Hank had a few provisions in the car and we had breakfast, but I've been worried. Did you discover anything?"

"No," the Blue Streak said. "Not as yet, but I will. You may be very sure of that. I simply need a little more time."

"You are going back right away?" Bess asked eagerly.

"Yes, and you must stay here. Luggar will be in soon and I expect him to lead me to a hideout. There has to be a hideout on that mountain, and a trail leading to it." The Blue Streak spoke with grim assurance.

"What makes you so sure that there is one?" Bess asked.

"Luggar and his pal got up on the mountain before we did, though he must have started much later than we did, and we know that they did not pass us on the trail. He got back in a hurry, too."

"I'd like to go with you," Bess said. "It's terrible just waiting here."

"Me, too. I like to be in on the fireworks," Hank said.

"This won't be the kill. I'll try to bring John Marigold back with me. If I do I may need both of you here, Bess as a nurse, and you as a driver, Hank. If you go along it will slow me up because three of us would have trouble working by daylight. And you might get hurt, and I'd have to take care of you." He spoke slowly.

"You're right," Bess said. "We'll wait here for you to return."

The Blue Streak helped himself to some tinned meat and a handful of biscuits. He waved to Bess and Hank, then once again moved off down the canyon.

Bess and Hank watched him as long as they could still see him.

Hank said, "There goes a right guy, and a bad one to start trouble with."

"He's wonderful," Bess agreed. "But this is a

strange and terrible case. Medusa is really a mastermind. It took a long time to convince me that I was playing with fire when I got involved with that phony count, but the episode on the mountain yesterday proved how stupid I've been. I just hope that everything works out all right."

"Aw, he'll clean up the crooked doc and have your uncle back before dark," Hank said. "I've watched him work many times before this. When he gets on a hot trail he smashes things and gets his man."

"I hope so," Bess said. "I've always fussed and fought with Unele John, but just the same I love him."

"Sure enough," Hank said. "Let's wait out under those trees where there's some shade. It's warm in here."

The Blue Streak moved swiftly into the timber behind the lodge. From there he worked his way to the retaining wall. He saw the rescue party come in and he watched several of the guests leave very hurriedly. This made him grin. He was sure he knew the reason they were leaving.

After a long wait he saw Midge come out of a side door with a rifle under his arm. Midge looked around, then headed for the woods. He walked along at a fast pace for a time. The Blue Streak

hesitated. Luggar had not appeared. It might be that Midge was heading for a secret cabin or building or cave. He slipped into the woods and followed Midge.

The gang's underling loitered along. He fired at a squirrel, missed, and later missed a rabbit. It was clear Midge was not a very good shot with a small-caliber rifle. The Blue Streak followed Midge only a few yards farther, then turned and hurried back toward the lodge.

Apparently Midge was not going to lead him to any important hideout or cabin, after all. Time was by now too precious to be wasted in following false clues or trails which led nowhere. Now he must make every hour count.

He circled the barns and even entered the main horse sheds. Then he worked around back of the house again. Somehow he had a feeling that the trail he sought started back of the lodge. Several men passed but none went off the grounds. Louie and Baby Face strolled out and sat at leisure on the porch.

Finally the Blue Streak turned to the mountain again. The secret had to be there, a cavern or a hidden building. And there had to be a way to get to it. Once he found that place of meeting he was sure he would have the case solved. He leaped from rock to rock and prowled around the base of

the mountain. He twice crossed the trail Bess and he had followed on their horseback ride the previous day.

Just at dusk he gave up the search. There was no trail and there was no building or cavern. He decided to send Bess in to the city with Hank as a bodyguard, then return and spend the night prowling, this time inside the lodge. He circled the lodge grounds and hurried along the deserted highway toward the car.

The Blue Streak entered the canyon and strode to the spot where the car was hidden. The car was there but he saw nothing of Bess or Hank. Bending, he read by the signs on the ground what had happened. As he straightened, his eyes blazed and he clenched his fists in anger and resolution. This was the last straw!

"Perhaps I have been handling those crooks too gently," he muttered grimly. He would not make that mistake again.

He whirled and leaped away. Before he reached the lodge some of his red anger had cooled. He might smash the lodge apart and tear Luggar apart with it, but this might not solve the case for him or even recover his friends. And surely this must be his primary purpose now. For at this time it was not only John Marigold who was fast in the clutches of the infamous Dr. Medusa, but also Bess Marigold,

whom he had been assigned to protect, and even his dear friend Hank. However much he might wish to punish the evildoers, his first task was to rescue his friends. There was no time to lose in anger or upon thoughts of revenge. All effort must be forged into an implacable wall of determination. Now he viewed his situation calmly and with a sense of sorting out the various things he had learned, making his clues lead to the end which he knew would be—first the recovery of his friends, then the bringing of the troublemakers to justice. He approached the lodge.

The grounds seemed strangely deserted as the Blue Streak moved across them. There was no light in the stablekeeper's cabin, and none in the cabin where the kitchen help lived. Lights shone from one room of the main building. It was the ground floor room which Count Luggar called his library.

Swiftly the Blue Streak crossed the back yard, pausing beside a thorn bush to listen. He heard a soft, grating sound from the direction of the lake. That was the only sound not normal to the mountain night with its insect life and its moving population of small, furred animals. The Blue Streak knew exactly *where* the sound came from, but he could not place its *cause*. It might have been caused by a stone slipping from the wall, or by a door

closing.

But he did not move over toward the retaining wall. He had moved along that brush-choked wall a number of times and had seen nothing. His hand closed on the latch of the back door. The door opened at once. The Blue Streak stepped noiselessly into the hall just off the kitchen, and silently closed the door.

From the hall he moved to the door of the big front room. There was no fire in the fireplace and not a single light burned. The room was cold and deserted. Slowly he moved back toward the library door. It stood ajar a few inches and he heard voices inside.

Leaning forward he looked into the room through a one-inch crack between the door and the casing. Joe and Mamie sat at the library table, while across from them sat Louie and Baby Face. Joe was as surly and sour as ever, but Louie seemed to be in extremely high spirits. The girls were laughing and talking about a party they had been on several nights before. Louie leaned toward Joe and spoke of a subject uppermost in his mind.

"Doc was sure mad at Luggar today," he said jovially.

"Yeah?" Joe said.

"I heard him send Luggar out to find the Mari-gold dame. He told Luggar it was the cavern for

him if he didn't bring her in within twenty-four hours." Louie grinned in malevolent appreciation of Luggar's plight.

"And did he?" Joe asked.

Louie shot a quick glance at Baby Face. Apparently she wasn't even listening to them. He shook his head.

"I dunno." A crafty look came over Louie's pock-marked face. "I reckon he's up in them big hills looking for her right now."

"I don't think so," Joe said as he poured a drink for himself and regarded it sourly.

"He better get her," Louie said. "After letting that Gibbs guy flim-flam him out of all those century notes he must be gettin' in pretty bad with the big boss."

"He got the bonds, didn't he?" Joe demanded. "Didn't lose nothing."

"He let a sucker get away from here with a cold half million," Louie said. "That's sure not like Luggar."

Joe grunted and turned his back on Louie. "You talk too much for your own good," he growled in a low voice.

"Wish the boss would send fer us and give us a job." Louie got to his feet and fished a cigar out of a full box on the table. "And that's Luggar's fault, too. He drove all them punks and their dames away

from here just as we was about to put on the big heat."

Joe stared at Louie.

"You must be crazy to let your lip run off that way," he said.

Louie looked uneasily around the room. "Yeah," he said. "Guess I shouldn't ought to spill so much stuff."

Joe got to his feet and stood looking down at Louie.

"Mebbe you want the big boss to hear this talk. You know he can," he said evenly.

"Aw, he won't be wastin' time listenin' in tonight," Louie said.

"He always listens in," Joe snapped. "An' if you ask me I'd say it was a good idea." Joe turned abruptly and headed for the door. "Me, I'm gettin' some fresh air."

The Blue Streak melted back into the shadows down the hall. He saw Joe come out of the room and step into a closet off the kitchen. Moving forward, he heard Joe talking to some person over a telephone. A few words told the Blue Streak that Joe was talking to the mastermind, Medusa, who evidently was close at hand.

"Yeah, boss, Louie and Baby Face are doubling us on something. You wanted me to let you know. I just found out so I thought I'd tell you. Want I

should send them over?"

"O.K., boss." The receiver clicked and the Blue Streak had to move back into the deep shadows. Joe came out of the closet. He lighted a cigaret and then strolled slowly down the corridor back to the library.

The Blue Streak waited eagerly. He had not heard Medusa's orders to Joe, but if Louie and Baby Face were to be sent to him the Blue Streak meant to be right behind them. Joe was talking and he listened intently.

"How about a four-handed game of poker over to the guest cabin by the back wall?" Joe made his voice sound eager.

"Sure," Louie said eagerly. "If the gals want to join in."

"I'll take out a couple of stacks," Baby Face said. "But if you try any fancy dealing, Joe, I'll claw your eyes out. Every time we start out to have a nice friendly game, you have to go and pull something crooked."

"Relax, Baby Face, nobody is going to try to put anything over on a smart gal like you," retorted Louie.

"I'll help out with a few hands," Mamie said languidly.

The Blue Streak felt a stab of disappointment. Medusa apparently had not sent for Louie. But he fol-

lowed the two couples out of the lodge and across the back yard to a small guest cabin which stood near the retaining wall.

Joe turned on a porch light as he stepped up on the door stone. This forced the Blue Streak to stay back behind the nearest clump of shrubbery. He was a full hundred feet from the cabin. Joe stepped back and the two women entered. Louie was close behind them. Suddenly the Blue Streak heard Baby Face scream. Louie's big bulk was framed in the lighted doorway. The Blue Streak saw it sway. Two hands lifted and their fingers clutched wildly at the air, then Louie pitched forward into the room.

A moment later Mamie stepped out. She was holding her skirt aside and she stepped over the bulk in the doorway. Joe stood just outside the door. He lighted a cigarette and the flash of the match cast a glow over a face as expressionless as that of a Ute Indian. Mamie took his arm. Her voice was strained but steady as she said, "That was smooth work, Joe."

In all of his previous dealings with criminals, the Blue Streak had never witnessed such a cold display of indifference toward death. A chill went down his back as he thought of the possible plight of his friends.

They strolled back to the house, passing close

to the Blue Streak. It was as though Joe had taken Mamie for a stroll in the cool night air for the pleasure of strolling. The Blue Streak made sure they entered the house. When a light came on in the library he moved toward the small guest house to start his investigation. At last, he felt that he was headed in the right direction, and that Doctor Medusa was now one step closer to his inevitable doom.

He had taken only one step when the porch light went out. A few seconds later the light in the cabin snapped off. He moved swiftly forward, closing his eyes to restore their night vision after the bright light.

The door was open and the Blue Streak stood looking into the cabin. He could see everything in the room. The two bodies he had expected to see on the floor were not there. Two large, fresh stains showed where Baby Face and Louie had fallen recently, but there was no visible sign of either body.

As he bent forward, the Blue Streak saw a trap door slowly closing. It fitted into place snugly and without sound. Noiselessly he entered the cabin, his tread as light as that of a cougar. Bending, he felt along the floor for a lift or handle. There was none. The door opened from below. He bent still lower and listened intently, concentrating his

whole attention on the spot.

There were sounds under the floor, soft, cautious sounds like the careful movement of a rat behind a wall panel. The Blue Streak tried to find a crack to thrust his fingers through so he would be able to jerk the door upward. The door fitted snugly into place.

He was about to leap outside to look for a basement window which he could smash when he sensed someone standing outside the door. Swiftly he slid across the floor and came face to face with the large, burly form of Midge. Midge could not see him because of the pitch blackness inside the room. He probably had heard only slight sounds.

"That you, Joe?" he muttered.

The Blue Streak spoke with the voice of Joe, but he made the voice appear to come from the back door of the lodge.

"Hey you, Midge, shake a leg and get in here. We're waiting for you."

Midge turned around. "I'm a-comin'!" he growled. He waddled away toward the lodge. The Blue Streak waited until the door had closed upon him, then he stepped outside. The cabin sills were set flush upon the granite rock which formed a ledge along the retaining wall. He whirled and entered the cabin again, to cross the room and place a shoulder against the wall next to the trap

door. As he heaved, the wall buckled and a space opened along the door. His fingers caught hold of the heavy planking and he heaved slowly upward.

As he pulled the trap door up he realized that it was controlled by powerful weights. There was at least a ton of resistance. The door opened wider and the Blue Streak dropped into the room below. As he landed he heard the door slowly and silently shut above his head. He found himself alone in a dim cavern.

He saw that he was in a large room, much larger than the cabin above it. No light was on but he saw every detail. In the center of the room on a table lay two marble slabs, and on those slabs rested the bodies of the recently killed Baby Face and Louie.

The room had no furniture, but flasks and huge urns and odd pieces of machinery stood about. A strange, damp smell like that of a limestone cave filled the place.

"Medusa has his own morgue, and it sure is an odd one," he muttered.

He moved around the room trying to locate a door in the solid rock wall. As he pounded his way along the wall he felt nothing but solid rock, until at the far end he found the door he was looking for. It was faced up with a thin panel of

granite and looked like the rest of the wall, except that it was open.

The Blue Streak moved through the door and found a flight of steps. A minute later he was out in the cool air above-ground. The stairs simply led up and out into the large back yard of the main lodge.

The Blue Streak stood a few yards from the death cabin and regarded it. He had examined the row of guest houses along the retaining wall. He had done so by daylight and at night. He did not remember having seen that stairway. But the open door explained the quick getaway of the assassins who had killed Baby Face and Louie. It seemed highly probable they had gone into the lodge while he was still trying to open the heavy trap door in the cottage.

The Blue Streak turned swiftly toward the lodge. The whole setup was baffling. There wasn't anything to hurl his strength against, just doors which when forced led to open doors which would likely vanish behind him. And somewhere near were Bess and Hank and John Marigold held in the power of the mad Doctor Medusa. They might be in danger of death at that moment. It was plain that Medusa was a cold and ruthless killer. The way he had handled his two underlings proved the man to be ruthless and completely without any mercy.

He must save his friends before they felt the complete wrath of this dastardly criminal. No one else could be of any use, he knew. The Blue Streak breathed deeply of the cool air and headed for the lodge.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PRISONERS

After Luggar left the room where Louie and Baby Face had tipped him off to Bess's hiding place, he did not go directly to the spot but slipped out of the lodge and down to the stables. There he got two horses and headed toward the hills, swinging around later and dropping into the highway below the grounds.

From long practice during the time he had spent here, he was able to find his way quickly to any point, and by the most secret routes, as well. He could hide his comings and goings very well from any visitors, although Dr. Medusa was another case, entirely. Now he was not trying to elude Dr. Medusa, but was on his way to the two whom the Blue Streak thought safely hidden from danger.

He was able to slip up the side canyon and locate Bess and Hank without disturbing or alarming them. With his two pistols drawn he carefully crept up behind the speedster, then stepped out boldly.

"Get up," he said softly.

He was directly behind Hank, who was dozing in the shade. Bess also had her back turned toward him. She jumped up and whirled around to face

him.

"You!" she cried.

Hank grunted, then lunged to his feet, pivoting to find the muzzle of a pistol pointing squarely at his heart.

"Get your hands up!" Luggar snapped. Then he bowed mockingly to Bess. "It seems as if I have to be firm with the girl who has promised to marry me."

"Shoot and get it over with," Bess snapped. "This time you shouldn't miss."

Hank's hands had lifted slowly. His eyes were blazing and his big mouth was clamped into a hard straight line. He spoke to Bess out of the side of his mouth.

"I'm not the Blue Streak, but I'll get you out of the clutches of this rat."

Hank felt keenly the responsibility which rested upon him. Always before he had been able to carry out to the letter any mission with which he had been entrusted. However, surrounded as they were by devious and mysterious paths about which Hank could have no useful knowledge, the enemy had the upper hand. Yet Hank intended to do all he could to save Bess. For himself he had no fear, and he had unshakable faith in the Blue Streak. But he knew that right now the rescue was up to him.

Luggar moved in a step closer to Hank and

their eyes locked. Hank was waiting for just one move that would give him a break, while Luggar was ready to shoot Hank and get him out of the way.

"Don't be foolish. He has you covered, and he's the kind of killer who will shoot," Bess warned the man beside her.

"The Blue Streak," Luggar said with a sneer. "He has been on my trail now for some time, I hear, but we haven't seen anything of this super-man."

"You will," Hank answered. "And very soon, too."

Luggar's lips pulled away from his teeth in a snarl. "He'll get just what you're going to get." He raised the barrel of his gun and brought it down quickly over Hank's head with sickening, smashing force.

Hank swayed, then crumpled to his knees, where he struggled for a moment before falling on his face in the grass.

"You coward," Bess said with cold fury blazing in her eyes.

Luggar faced her.

"You're coming with me, Miss High-and-Mighty. The boss wants to have a talk with you," he snarled.

"Doctor Medusa?" Bess asked, with a proud toss of her head.

Luggar laughed. "Sure," he said. "We're partners in a big way."

"Does he have Uncle John?" Bess asked quickly.

"Sure. Mebbe he'll let you see the old man." He stepped closer and flipped out the silk rope. "I'll just tie you up a bit."

Bess tensed her muscles. She was a strong and active girl who followed sports and felt she could give a good account of herself if Luggar lowered his guns. He had said enough to convince her that Doctor Medusa had ordered her to be taken alive at all costs.

Luggar shoved his guns into his side pockets and uncoiled the rope. As he reached for her arm Bess swung a right at his chin. She missed that receding chin and her little fist landed squarely under his eye, just above his dapper mustache. There was force behind that right and it brought a grunt of pain and anger from Luggar. When she stepped in and crossed with her left, he let out a bellow of fury and lunged at her.

Bess had boxed with friends in the gym at home. She knew what she should do, but her one hundred and fifteen pounds and the shortness of her arms kept her from doing it well enough to keep Luggar away from her. She stabbed with her left, hard jolting jabs which kept him off balance for a brief space, and she crossed with her right. The biggest

damage came from her diamond ring, the ring he had given her several weeks before. It cut his face and added to the hurt of an already blackening eye.

Fury and chagrin made Luggar smash out at Bess. His blows were wild, but one landed and she was knocked off balance. Luggar gripped her arms and pinned them to her sides before she was able to gain her equilibrium.

"You little hellcat!" His voice was thick with cold fury.

Bess laughed. She was getting some satisfaction out of the punishment she had dealt him. Now that he had her arms pinned she kicked and tried to bite him.

"I'll gag you and tie your feet!" Luggar bellowed. He did just that. After Bess was trussed tightly he picked her up and stood looking down at Hank's crumpled body.

"I better toss him into the bushes," he said sourly. "If the boss wants him I'll send some of the boys after him."

He set Bess down and dragged Hank across a pile of rocks, dumping him over a bank into a little gully which was choked with brakes and blackberry bushes.

Returning to Bess he picked her up and carried her to where he had left the horses. He put her

across the saddle of a big bay and tied her on like a sack of grain. Mounting his horse he led the pack horse out onto the highway.

He was careful to listen for cars and to look up and down the road. The discovery that the Blue Streak was on the trail made him very uneasy. In spite of his boasting and sneers he feared the Blue Streak. He had heard too many tales of what that young man did to criminals. He had heard rumors in the underworld that the bullet had never been molded which would kill him. This was something to scare Luggar, because he depended heavily upon the slugs from his guns.

No one saw him pass the lodge. He unloaded Bess, and turned the horses loose to go to the stables. Hoisting her to his shoulder he entered one of the cabins back of the lodge. It was a small cabin, neatly furnished with bed, dresser, wash-bowl and a small box shower. There was a rug on the hardwood floor and two easy chairs stood near the bed.

Luggar moved a picture on the wall. There was a small lever under the picture hook. He pushed the lever and the whole floor of the room began to settle. The room was nothing more than an elevator. Down it went, stopping twenty feet below ground. Luggar walked through a wide door. Without his aid the floor of the cabin went back

up to its proper place. Surely everything in this underground world was a marvel of modern science working through a mad mastermind.

Luggar hurried down a white-tiled passageway that was lighted with white light from concealed tubes. He came to a heavy door and pressed a button, then put his ear to a perforated panel and listened intently.

"Who is it?" came the cold, piercing voice of Doctor Medusa.

"It's Luggar, boss. I have the gal right here for you."

"Good. You may proceed," stated the uncompromising voice.

Luggar turned left and stood facing the tiled wall. After a few minutes a section of the wall moved and slid aside. Luggar walked past a wizened little man seated on a stool. The old fellow blinked at him and mumbled something as he worked the intricate mechanism which closed the opening.

Luggar was used to the elaborate mechanical setup Medusa had built underground as a protection of the vast underworld empire he was creating. The door at which he had stopped before was a false lead. Anyone breaking it down would enter a natural tunnel leading into a maze of unexplored caverns, and would be hopelessly lost. And any-

one discovering the door would force it and go on to his doom, naturally.

Moving swiftly, Luggar passed two other heavy stone panels, each operated from the inside by an old man.

At last he set Bess down in a chair in a large room which was brightly lighted. Her eyes darted around the room in amazement. It was furnished luxuriously with deep comfortable chairs, lounges and all the small details complete to make a perfect apartment. Luggar picked up a phone.

"We're here, boss," he said.

Now that he had carried out the doctor's orders in regard to Bess Marigold, Luggar began to regain his old self-assurance. Surely now the boss would forget about his ill-advised remark upon the hillside. This weak-chinned underling even began to imagine that Dr. Medusa *needed* him. While he waited his feeling of importance returned.

It took Doctor Medusa fifteen minutes to reach the apartment. His outer office, where he usually met his men and where he worked, was some distance from this spot. It was connected with the back yard of the lodge by a stone door of its own and was hidden away from this portion of his underground world.

He entered the apartment and stood looking from Luggar to Bess. Suddenly he began to laugh,

a cold humorless laugh.

"It seems you had some trouble with Miss Mari-gold," he said. Then he added, "Take off that gag and untie her at once."

Luggar did as he was ordered but he was very careful about it. When her hands and ankles and lips were freed Bess lay back and looked at Doctor Medusa. His gaze, which was on her unwaveringly, was cold and impersonal. It was as though he had never met her before. Gone was the polite smoothness, the reassuring manner of the capable medical man.

"Well," Bess asked. "Are you going to let me see Uncle John?"

"Certainly," Medusa answered. "He will share this apartment with you. I have sent for him." He turned to Luggar. "You may go now, but not back to the lodge. You are to live in the Silent City from now on. Your usefulness above is ended as far as I am concerned."

Luggar turned white and moisture broke out on his face, giving it a greenish tint like the skin of a wet frog.

"Not that, please, not that," he muttered in a tortured voice.

The picture of the stooped, silent men who inhabited Medusa's underground city was very bright in his mind, and the thought that he was

about to become one of them was almost more than he could stand.

"Yes, that, or would you prefer to become one of my fine pieces of statuary?" Medusa's voice was low but chilling.

Luggar stumbled out of the room like a man walking in a stupor.

Medusa turned to Bess.

"Your uncle will arrive in a few minutes." He walked to a table and pushed one of the numerous buttons. "I am ordering a hot meal for the two of you," he said.

Before the meal arrived the door opened and John Marigold stepped into the room. A man walked beside him. He stood for a minute as though listening, then he spoke. Bess was so choked with emotion that her cry of greeting to her uncle had caught in her throat.

"Bess, are you here?"

"Uncle John!" Bess rushed across the room. She flung her arms around the old man, then she cried, "You are blind!"

"Only for the duration of his stay here," Medusa's cold voice informed her.

Bess led her uncle to a chair. She was fighting back tears of anger and helplessness. Finally she turned upon Medusa.

"You fiend," she cried.

He smiled at her and lifted a hand. "No need for a burst of temperament. It will do no good. I am leaving you two together. Your meal will arrive shortly."

He turned and left the room.

"This is terrible, Uncle John," Bess said. "And it's all my fault."

"There, there." He patted her hand. "I have not been treated badly, Bess. I believe I'll get away from this place, wherever it is, and I'll get you away. Medusa is after money you know, and I have lots of it."

"You haven't seen this place, any of it?" Bess asked.

Wild thoughts were running through her mind as she thought.

"No," he answered. "The doctor drugged my eyes while he was supposedly treating me at home. I have been blind since the Blue Streak rescued me and took me home. Where is he? Is he still working on this case?"

"Yes," Bess said, struggling to make her voice sound steady. "I believe he will solve it and bring Medusa and his gang to justice."

"Say no more," Marigold said.

He lifted a finger to his lips and became very quiet.

Bess knew by that sign that what they said was

being heard by other ears. She was glad he could not see the stricken look which came into her eyes as she sat there. She had been allowed to see much of this fantastic underground world. Her uncle had not been allowed to see any of it. That could only mean Medusa never intended her to leave his caverns alive. She wondered if she could give him information to take out. She dared not talk, but she might be able to write a short message for the Blue Streak.

She sighed deeply. Medusa certainly would not let Uncle John get out of his underground world with any written message. For all that he was mad, Medusa was far too brilliant to allow such a thing to happen. The only possible hope lay in the Blue Streak, and the probability of his discovering an entrance to this underground world of Dr. Medusa's was not likely.

At that moment the dinner Medusa had ordered arrived. Two white-clad men brought it in. They were silent men with colorless faces and lusterless eyes. They moved like men walking and acting in a dream. These men had been forced to live in the Silent City.

When they had left, Bess and John Marigold had dinner. Bess was determined to eat something in an effort to keep up her strength. She refused to give up hope. Marigold ate a hearty meal. He was convinced

he could buy his way to freedom and also free Bess. Having seen nothing of the underground system in this mountain honeycombed with caves, he could not be impressed by it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A HOT TRAIL

The Blue Streak had taken only a few steps toward the lodge when he noticed a man moving around the house. He was well screened by the shrubbery but it was clear he was being very careful not to be detected by anyone about on the grounds. The Blue Streak moved closer, easing around shrubs and sliding forward without a sound to disturb the evening quiet.

Stepping past a big rose bush he came face to face with Hank. Hank started to leap back, being unable to recognize objects in the dark as the Blue Streak could.

"Easy there, Hank," the Blue Streak called warningly.

"That you, boss?" Hank answered eagerly as he moved forward.

The Blue Streak caught him by the arm to keep him from stumbling.

"Where is Bess?" he whispered.

"I dunno, boss. That Luggar thug slipped up on us. He said Medusa wanted Bess." Hank lifted a hand to his head. "I let him konk me over the head with a forty-five. Got a lump on my bean as big as

an egg. Luggar must have dumped me into a gully, probably thought I was done for. I came around and headed over here looking for Bess, and hoping to be able to rescue her."

The Blue Streak's grip tightened on Hank's arm. "We had better not talk here. I've held back trying to trail someone to Medusa. I don't want to alarm any of the gang until we locate the place where he is holding Bess and Marigold."

He guided Hank toward one of the many guest cabins.

"We can talk in one of these cabins," said the superdetective.

They entered the cabin and found chairs which they pulled close together. The Blue Streak left the door open and sat so that he could look out into the yard. Then he would be able to observe anything which went on out there. Perhaps even now events might be taking place which would lead him to Bess and her uncle. Therefore, even while he listened to Hank's story, and rejoiced that his friend was alive and here with him, the Blue Streak faced the yard, that he might know if anything of interest transpired. As always, the Blue Streak's senses were alert to every possibility and every sound in the dark night, even while he questioned Hank.

"Did Luggar give any hint as to where he was taking Bess?"

He had little hope that this would be so, but perhaps Hank had heard some remark dropped inadvertently, which could be used as a lead.

Hank shook his head.

"The only tip I had was that he was going to take her there on a horse, so I figured he was coming to the lodge," he said.

"He didn't mention a cave or a cavern or an old mine?"

"Nope," Hank said. "I let him konk me before I had time to hear much."

The Blue Streak got to his feet. He looked around the cabin. "I'm baffled on several points," he said as he moved toward the wash bowl in the corner. He turned the cold water faucet, thinking he would get a drink. No water came out of the faucet. He tried the hot water tap and no water came.

"I guess I'll have a nice, cold drink, too," Hank said.

He had moved over beside the Blue Streak and was bending forward hopefully, waiting for the refreshing drink of water.

"I did not find water but I've found something else." There was an eager note in the Blue Streak's voice.

He caught hold of the wash bowl and stand. With ease he moved it out of the corner.

"Fake fixtures," he said softly.

"What's that mean?" Hank asked. He was still bewildered.

"It means this is not a guest cabin at all but a blind for something else, possibly the entrance to Medusa's den." He began examining the walls, moving furniture and things, tipping back pictures. Hank could not see what he was doing but he could hear.

"I've got it!" There was a note of triumph in the Blue Streak's voice. "Come over here next to me, Hank."

Hank felt his way across the room. He stood beside the Blue Streak in the darkness, waiting for directions.

"Stand close to me. I've found a switch and am about to pull it. There's no telling what may happen."

The Blue Streak caught Hank by the arm as he said these words.

He pulled the wall switch he had found behind a picture. They felt the floor begin to settle downward.

"Feels like an elevator," Hank muttered under his breath.

"That's what it is!" his boss cried. "Remember, if we barge in on Medusa and his gang you are to stay behind me. Don't get mixed up in anything until I need you."

"All I want is a crack at that guy Luggar," Hank answered. He wasn't forgetting that rap on the head very soon.

Suddenly the elevator stopped and the Blue Streak saw a passage ahead.

"Come," he said briefly.

They stepped hastily but cautiously off the cabin floor and at once it began to move slowly back up into place.

"Know how to get it back down?" Hank asked nervously.

"No, I don't," the Blue Streak said with a sly chuckle. "We'll leave this place by the front entrance in style."

They moved down a stone passageway that was dimly lighted by concealed bulbs or tubes. Finally they halted before a heavy door. The Blue Streak signaled Hank to keep still. He examined the door and the walls around it. The walls were of masonry at that point. Huge blocks of stone had been set in place without mortar or cement. The door was of solid two-inch thick wood.

Nodding to Hank to get behind him, the Blue Streak stepped back. He crouched for a second then hurled himself forward. His shoulder hit the door with a solid thud. There was a splintering of wood and the door collapsed, some of its two-inch timbers sticking out where they had broken under the ter-

rific jolt they had received. As always, when confronted with a display of his boss's enormous strength, Hank marveled. He could not get used to it. Each time he was amazed anew.

Eagerly the Blue Streak and Hank leaped forward. Hank had his heavy mechanic's wrench in his hand. The passageway beyond the door was dark and the floor littered with loose stones. Hank was forced to crowd close to his boss.

They moved down a long passageway, then climbed up over a jumble of rocks to enter a high-ceilinged cavern. The Blue Streak could see a high, arching tunnel at the far side of the cavern. They crossed a floor covered with tumbled rocks and broken stalactites which had crashed down from the high ceiling.

"Wish I had a light," Hank growled in exasperation. "I've barked my shins at least ten times already."

"Stick as close to me as you can," the Blue Streak called back over his shoulder. "We should get some place in a hurry."

They entered the tunnel and moved on, climbing upward at a rapid rate. The tunnel twisted and turned. Finally it branched out into three separate tunnels.

The Blue Streak halted.

"Three tunnels branch off right here. We'll take

the right-hand tunnel, then if we miss we'll come back and try the next one. That's about the only thing we can do."

"Any danger of gettin' lost in here?" Hank asked. "By the sound of the echoes there must be hundreds of caves."

"If you could see as I do you'd raise that estimate to thousands," the Blue Streak said grimly. "This is not going to be as easy as I had hoped. It will be *very* difficult."

"Hey!" Hank gasped. "Something soft and furry hit me in the face."

"That was a bat. There're a lot of them flying along this tunnel," the Blue Streak answered matter-of-factly.

"Bat nothing. That thing weighed four, five pounds." Hank answered.

"That would be about right, they're big fellows. But I don't think they'll hurt you." The Blue Streak laid a hand on Hank's arm. "Better walk up here beside me."

Hank moved up and they started out again. The tunnel curved and twisted and turned with branches shooting down from it and upward, too. The Blue Streak laid out a plan to follow and stuck to it even though he was beginning to feel that finding any spot under the honeycombed mountain was next to hopeless. He also began to wonder what luck

they would have finding their way out again. With dozens of tunnels branching off the main one he was trying to follow, it would be a mighty hard job going back.

But the Blue Streak had one advantage over an ordinary explorer. He could see where he was going and notice markings and other signposts for later use.

They finally came to a small cavern which marked the end of the tunnel. The Blue Streak turned Hank around.

"Well, we've hit a blind alley," he said. "We'll have to go back."

"I reckon we're lost," Hank said in a most doleful tone.

"Not yet," the Blue Streak answered with an encouraging laugh.

They moved back along the tunnel. The Blue Streak took what he was sure was the right return passage. He soon realized he had missed a turn or taken a wrong branch somewhere. They walked out into a big cavern which was filled with the roar of an underground river. The river came boiling up out of a hole at one end of the cavern, swirled across the floor and entered the rocky wall at the lower end.

"What's that sucking sound that I hear?" Hank asked.

"That's a river being sucked into a hole in the floor of the cavern just ahead," the Blue Streak explained.

The cavern floor sloped steeply down to the groove where the waters raced. It gleamed wet and slimy, lighted palely by a phosphorescent glow from the walls.

"I can see a little here," Hank said.

"Don't go near that sloping floor, it's slippery!" the Blue Streak warned.

His warning came too late. Hank already had stepped forward. His feet shot out from under him and he went shooting down toward the sucking, roaring river. The Blue Streak leaped after him, but the floor was as slick as grease and very steep. He found himself shooting downward toward the water along with Hank.

They hit the water just as the Blue Streak gripped Hank's arm. He pulled Hank to him as the boiling water closed over them. The pull was terrific. Down they went, with the Blue Streak shielding Hank and battling the lashing water. Like an arm with a thousand hands the water pulled them under and down into the sink-hole. The Blue Streak was able to keep them steady by the powerful strokes of his one free hand.

For less than a minute they were in the grip of the water, then they were hurled upward, and the

Blue Streak's head broke water on the surface of a lake. He shook the water from his eyes and looked around. There was a rocky ledge near by. With a few powerful strokes he reached it and dragged Hank out. They sat on the ledge while the Blue Streak looked over this new cavern. It was large and high-arched, big enough to hold the little lake and to have room for a strip of bare rock. It was an underground prison for the Blue Streak and Hank.

"Where we at now?" Hank asked, his teeth chattering.

"Bottled up in a big cave which does not seem to have any outlet except the one we just came through," the Blue Streak answered grimly as he surveyed their plight.

"In that case we stay here. The power of that water was terrific," Hank said gloomily, almost reconciled to his doom.

"We're not staying here," the Blue Streak answered. "But I'll admit we may be delayed a while."

He looked up at the high ceiling and saw a flight of bats sweeping swiftly across it. The big, black, furry fellows seemed to be everywhere in the cavern.

"I'd like to be sittin' right next to a big, hot stove," Hank said.

The Blue Streak did not answer. He was considering their plight from every angle, and he was forced

to admit they were in a tough spot. This time he was faced with gigantic forces, and he was not able to bring his extraordinary powers to bear upon them.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE MASTER PLAN

Doctor Medusa was in high spirits. He even smiled as Count Luggar sat down across the desk from him in his underground office. Luggar didn't smile. His face was drawn, and he had lost all of his dapper jauntiness. At the moment he would hardly have been able to pass himself off for the real count. The sight of the many others whom Dr. Medusa had caused to die had left him completely unmoved, and many times Count Luggar himself had killed with no feeling of sorrow or even of shame or fear. Now, however, the picture looked entirely different to him. Now he knew that the mastermind had decreed his death. Like all cowards and bullies, thought of harm to himself completely undermined his strength. He could think of nothing but his impending and inexorable doom.

"You will need to pull yourself together, and recover some of your poise, my dear count," Medusa said in a sneering voice.

Luggar did not say anything. He just stared at the mastermind who controlled him, and who had shortly before doomed him to a life in the silent underground.

"I have changed my plans," Medusa said. "You are to return to the city."

Luggar straightened suddenly and opened his mouth, then just as suddenly closed it again, unable to speak.

"There has been a very promising turn in our affairs," Medusa said. "The Blue Streak, whom I now confess had me deeply worried, is out of the way."

"Did you kill him?" Luggar asked hopefully, his eyes brightening.

The sag had gone out of his shoulders and he was rubbing his hands together eagerly. He saw his own freedom ahead.

"He broke down the fake door, smashed it with his bare hands. Then he followed the tunnel into the maze of caverns," Medusa said. "It has been a masterful triumph of my great mind over his great strength."

"But he may find his way back out," Luggar said doubtfully.

"He and his man are dead," Medusa said confidently. "I had Indian Pete trail them. He saw them go down through the whirlpool in the wet cavern. They have been ground to pulp on the rocks by now."

"Not even that guy could stand up under that," Luggar agreed. "Have you any idea where that river

goes to when she drops from sight under the cavern wall?"

"No. I have never been able to get past that whirlpool." Medusa leaned forward. "But now I will tell you something of my master plan. You are to marry the Marigold girl. I have returned to my previous plan in that regard."

Luggar stared at the doctor.

"Be kind of hard to work, won't it?" he asked. "Her friends must have done a lot of talking after they got back to the city."

"My plan takes care of all that. You, Count Luggar, have had an urgent call to return to your own country. You must marry and leave at once. The whole affair which was reported so unfavorably was all a mistake. Bess will say so herself." Medusa laughed.

"Sounds good so far, boss," Luggar said. "Then what happens?"

"There will be a quiet wedding at the Marigold place. Her uncle has always handled her finances, and he will return with you. Joe and Mamie will go along. I will have several other couples there upon whom we can depend. We will invite a few of her close friends to attend the ceremony. Marigold and Bess will know that one false move will mean death, with my people all around them. Joe will see to it that they speak to no one alone and do not use a

phone, except at his order." Medusa chuckled. "It is a perfect plan, a perfect plan. This time I cannot possibly fail."

"How do we get their money?" Luggar asked, in a baffled voice.

"Marigold is to convert her fortune and a large part of his own to cash. They want to help Luggar who is going back to his country to help his people. He can do that without leaving his place. The bank will send him the money, Joe will bring it to me." Medusa laughed.

"Has she agreed to marry me?" Luggar asked, in a still doubtful tone.

"She does not even know she is going to marry you, yet," Medusa said. "But undoubtedly she will agree without hesitation, after I have shown her a few things, including my hall of statues, and the silent city."

"You're not going to make a statue out of her?" Luggar asked.

"Yes, I have my mind set on that. It will be dangerous to leave Bess or her uncle in the city any longer than it takes to get the cash. They will be delivered to my laboratory twenty-four hours after they leave here. However, they are not to know this part of my plan. It will help if they are convinced they are buying their lives." He leaned back and smiled. "And, of course, they will think they will

have a chance to recover their money, once they are free."

"You have a mind, there's no mistaking that," Luggar said.

"Her friends will think she has slipped away with her count to help him restore his country to a happy state again. There will be no search or investigation. Her uncle has accompanied them for a much-needed vacation." Medusa got to his feet. "Now we will inform them of their good fortune."

Bess and her uncle had talked very little while waiting in the luxurious apartment. They were sure either Medusa or one of his henchmen could hear everything they said, so there was little point in talking.

Marigold finally did tell Bess, in a well-guarded whisper,

"We better make any kind of a deal we can to get out of here, Bess. Doctor Medusa is a madman, no doubt about that, and he feels he is secure from the law." He paused, then added, "I can tell as much without being able to see anything about me."

"If you could see you'd be more sure," Bess answered.

At that moment the door opened softly. Medusa and Luggar entered. Luggar was again the jaunty

count. He was dressed in a gray business suit, his carefully trimmed mustache was waxed and his hair looked as though it had just been curled. He smelled of his personal and expensive perfume, and he was smiling pleasantly.

Medusa was extremely affable, too. Once again he was the medical man dropping in to see his patients.

"I am sure you will be delighted to know you are going home today," he said as he seated himself comfortably.

Luggar walked over and stood possessively beside Bess.

Bess did not move a muscle. She ignored the chair Luggar moved toward her, nor did she bother to answer Medusa.

"It was a mistake to separate you two." Medusa looked from Bess to Luggar. "The count has convinced me of that. I have decided to allow you two to get married."

Bess started and her face flushed with anger as she tried to control her voice. "You have decided," she said very slowly. "Did you ever stop to think that I might not want to marry the count?"

"No, I did not consider that angle of the matter," Medusa answered, his voice growing just a shade harder.

"What sort of scheme is this? What's your game,

Medusa?" John Marigold demanded in a voice of sudden strength.

"Bess is to marry Count Luggar. She will present him with a dowry, and you will add a generous wedding gift of cash," Medusa said. "The ceremony will be held in your own home. Both of you will be allowed to return."

"I wouldn't let her marry that rat. I'd rather rot here in this hole." Marigold's voice rose almost to a shout.

Bess turned and faced Luggar. Her voice was calm. She was positive Medusa and his gang would never keep a promise. She meant to use fire against fire.

"I know he's a phony count," she said. "In fact he's just a cheap gunman dressed up in expensive clothes. He couldn't pass for a man any place, except here." She laughed shortly. "This is a matter of paying off. Why not let me pay off without marrying a phony?" She turned from Luggar to Medusa.

"Because I have a beautiful plan, and your marriage just happens to fit that plan," Medusa answered with a jaunty air.

"And if I refuse to marry him? If I start shouting at the altar?" Bess asked. She had herself well under control.

"There will be no altar. Your wedding guests will

be carefully selected as will the justice of the peace who marries you. If you make trouble you, your uncle and the several of your close friends who attend the wedding will never leave your uncle's house alive." Medusa's voice was harsh. "If you refuse to go you will die here. I have little time to waste upon either of you. Everything is settled—everything."

He got to his feet.

Looking at him Bess knew he would do just what he said.

"I'll marry him," she said slowly, realizing it was the only answer that could prolong her life.

"Bess! I forbid you to marry this gangster!" John Marigold shouted angrily. He was crimson with impotent rage.

Bess laughed. "Now, Uncle John, don't let's have a fight here before Doctor Medusa and my future husband."

Luggar smiled and stepped toward Bess. She turned on him.

"I'm sure you won't regret marrying me," he said eagerly.

"You'll regret it if you come any nearer," Bess snapped.

Luggar halted, and his hard, cruel eyes narrowed. "You'll have to learn how to be nice to me," he said.

"You will leave here in a half-hour," Medusa said, looking at his watch. He turned to Luggar. "Come with me."

They left the room and Bess waited a few anguished moments to make sure they were not going to return before she stepped to her uncle's side and took his hand.

"They're gone, Unele John," she whispered. "Hold on to your temper. We'll beat them at their own crooked game."

"They'll watch us every second. They'll have guns in our baeks every minute," Marigold said bitterly. He found Bess's hand and patted it. "But we're not lieked yet." He did not add that he was sure this was a double cross.

Bess was thinking the same thing, but she, too, kept it to herself.

Each felt in his heart that this was the end for them both. Fantastic as their situation seemed, it was real, and the danger to each of them was real. No matter how much they tried to fool each other, deep in their hearts each knew how desperate was their situation, yet each was determined that the other should hope. But even hope seemed an idle dream.

Again Bess felt that her own position was a little worse than that of her uncle's, for she had been allowed to see the seerets of the underground world.

Yet she knew that knowledge of her own inevitable death—or worse—would only add to her uncle's sorrow. She bravely remained silent wondering what had happened to the Blue Streak.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BAT TRAIL

Hank was shaking from the cold. His teeth chattered so he could not talk. The damp blackness pressed in upon him until he was sure he could feel it. The Blue Streak had left him seated on a rock while he moved about seeking a way to escape from the cavern they had plunged into when the river had caught them and sucked them down. His ears were filled with the roar of the black water as it spouted out into the little lake.

Suddenly he felt a strong hand on his arm and the Blue Streak's voice came to him, steady and assuring.

"Come along, Hank. I think I have found something."

"Hope so," Hank said with an effort. "I'm about chilled through."

They moved across a broad shelf of rock which sloped upward. Finally they halted. Hank put out his hand and felt a cold rock wall.

"No opening?" he asked glumly.

"The bats were able to come in," the Blue Streak said. "If they could enter in swarms we ought to be able to get out."

"I'm a lot bigger than a bat ever thought of being," Hank muttered.

"Right, but you're not wider than four of these bats flying wing to wing," the Blue Streak said. "Take my hand, we're going up the side of this cliff."

Hank's wet boots were slippery and his hands were numb. He couldn't understand how the Blue Streak was able to clutch projecting rocks and swing upward.

After two failures he called up, "I jest can't make it. You go on."

The Blue Streak moved back to the shelf to help his friend.

"On my back," he ordered.

"That'll jest make it so you can't go up," Hank growled.

"Get on," the Blue Streak said sharply. "We have to hurry."

With Hank on his back the Blue Streak started up the wall. There was little chance to get a hold with his toes, most of the climb had to be done by pulling himself upward with his arms. He moved steadily up.

Finally Hank shouted happily, "I can see light above there!"

There was light, coming from a hole above. As they moved up toward it Hank saw that they were

in a sort of chimney which narrowed as they worked upward. Soon the Blue Streak was able to brace his feet on either side and move upward more rapidly than before.

The hole proved to be wide enough to pass through easily. As they neared it they saw bats swirling in and out.

"Must be about dark the way the bats are coming out," the Blue Streak said.

As he pushed through the hole into open air Hank saw that he was right. The sun was setting back of a high peak. They were on the lower slope of a mountain.

The Blue Streak swept the slope below with his powerful eyes.

"The lodge is down there," he said, pointing toward the valley below. "We'd better hit for it."

"I'll be able to walk now," Hank said. "Mebbe I'll get warmed up."

Hank did get warmed up as he fought to keep pace with the Blue Streak. Several times the Blue Streak swung him across narrow fissures or heaved him up on a ledge. They were taking a direct route to the lodge and the going was too rugged for an ordinary man.

Finally they broke into a dense growth of timber, then out on a meadow. Below them stood Count Luggar's lodge. Evening shadows were already en-

veloping it. Suddenly, the Blue Streak caught Hank's arm.

"Look!" he said tensely.

Hank peered toward the buildings below. He saw several saddle horses coming up from the lake and the station wagon parked near the front porch. The black sedan stood beside it.

"I think we're going to find Medusa in the lodge," the Blue Streak said. "Come on. We'll have to travel fast now."

He set off at a pace Hank could not follow. Blowing hard, Hank raced along after him. The Blue Streak moved boldly up to the front door and took the steps at one bound. He moved across the porch and jerked open the front door. He was through with playing a waiting game.

There was no one in the hall and no one in the big living-and-lounging room. He moved toward the library and jerked open the door. That room was empty, too. He halted and listened. He could hear Hank pounding across the porch but there was no other sound.

Whirling, he raced out into the hall, almost upsetting Hank who was charging into the lodge after him.

"Out to the cabin with the elevator," the Blue Streak snapped.

As they moved around the house the Blue Streak

saw that some of the windows had been boarded up. It appeared Count Luggar was closing his place. Lumber was piled below the other windows ready to be nailed over them.

They reached the cabin where the floor moved downward. The switch worked and they settled down into the ground. A few strides took them to the spot where the Blue Streak had smashed in the fake door. It had been carefully repaired and all traces of wreckage had been carted away.

The Blue Streak stood looking at the walls on each side of the door. Finally he stepped to the wall on his left. He put his ear against it, and listened. Then he placed a shoulder against it and slowly began to press. Suddenly a grim smile parted his lips.

"Here is our door, Hank," he said. "There's no mistaking it this time."

Hank looked at the heavy blocks of stone and shook his head.

"Couldn't be," he said.

The Blue Streak braced his feet and heaved. Slowly the wall moved, a fraction of an inch, then an inch. From the crack which opened came a whirring sound as hidden mechanism surrendered to the power of his straining muscles. Then the wall moved faster. It swung back and bright lights flooded the opening.

On a stool inside the doorway sat an old man. His eyes were popping and his mouth was open. With a shriek he leaped from the stool and fled down a tiled passageway.

"This time we're on the right trail," Hank almost shouted.

"Wait!" the Blue Streak held up a warning hand.

They both listened. Hank heard nothing, but the Blue Streak heard a car motor racing as someone warmed it up. He whirled about and started back through the passage.

"Come! We've missed them. They have left by another passageway!"

They pounded back to the elevator. Only a rock wall faced them and the Blue Streak began a hurried search for a switch. He finally found it after moving a loose rock from the wall. He pulled it and listened. The elevator above was moving downward. When it came to a halt it paused a moment, then started back up.

"Hurry, get in!" the Blue Streak said in an urgent voice.

They moved into the elevator and were slowly lifted into the cabin above. As soon as the floor was in place so that the door could be opened they rushed out of the cabin. They were in time to see two red taillights and two sets of headlights moving along the canyon road.

"They got away," Hank said in a tone filled with disgust.

"The thing we have to know now," the Blue Streak said, "is whether to go back and search their hideout or to follow them to the city."

It was not an easy decision to make.

"You think they have Bess and her uncle with them?" Hank asked.

"That's what I have to know. If we go back underground we may be too late to save Bess and Mari-gold. That is, if they are in those cars."

The Blue Streak moved over to the building. "Ought to be somebody who saw them leave," he muttered.

They searched the house, the outlying cabins and even the barns but found no one. The riders who had come in from around the lake had vanished along with their horses.

"This place is completely deserted," Hank muttered. "No servants, not even a caretaker. Sure is funny."

"They're all underground," the Blue Streak said grimly.

They were back at the front porch. "I guess we'll have to search the cavern hideout under the mountain," the Blue Streak said slowly. "It's quite likely those cars took in the servants and the stablehands. Medusa evidently isn't going to use this place any

more."

"I'm rarin' to get some action," Hank answered.
"Let's go."

"Now you *will* see action," said the Blue Streak.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A WEDDING

Medusa had given last-minute instructions to Joe and Luggar. It was important that everything go off according to plan. There must be no hitch, not even in the very tiniest detail. With mad precision Dr. Medusa had worked everything out most carefully.

"Bring them back here just as soon as you have the money from Marigold. Have him hand it over before the ceremony, then get Bess's friends out of the house as soon as the ceremony is performed and the justice of the peace has gone. Bring them here alive."

"Sure," Joe agreed. "But suppose we have some trouble with them? What do we do in a case like that?"

"Then, you fool, bring them in dead," Medusa snapped.

Joe took charge while Luggar walked with Bess. They passed out through the side entrance and stepped into the grounds of the lodge. All of the servants had been sent away. The place was deserted, except for the black sedan and the station wagon which were waiting to take them into town. Luggar and Joe rode in the black sedan with Bess

and her uncle. Midge was their driver.

"Get a move on," Joe growled. "Let's get this thing over."

Midge sent the black sedan roaring out of the grounds and along the canyon road. The station wagon followed behind with a number of Medusa's toughest gunmen in it as well as Mamie and Della.

Bess watched the evening shadows gather. There was no talking though Luggar kept smirking at her. She refused even to glance at him. Her mind was busy trying to figure out a way to notify the police. She was determined to trap the criminals even though she had to pay for it with her life. John Marigold sat beside her, his mouth clamped shut in a grim line.

The sad and silent wedding party moved on, the only sound was that of the powerful motor of the car which bore them on their way.

They slipped out of the canyon and roared along the main highway. Finally they turned in at the familiar gate of the Marigold place. As they pulled up at the door Stafford hurried out. He was almost overcome with joy at seeing both Bess and her uncle. But his smile faded as he watched the party descend from the station wagon. Their appearance aroused his suspicions. Neither relief nor happiness was in their faces.

Joe took charge as soon as they entered the big

house. He detailed a man to watch Stafford, and others to stay close to the housekeeper. Mamie and Della kept within a few feet of Bess. Mamie displayed a wicked little automatic which Bess had no doubt she could use.

"I have orders to use it in case of funny business," she said.

Bess had hoped there would be a delay of several hours but Joe announced the justice would arrive within a few minutes. Medusa had sent messages to Bess's friends and they began to arrive shortly after the party entered the big living-room where the ceremony was to be held.

John Marigold had gone to his library with Joe. He was fighting for time, but Joe made it clear he would not give him any chance to tip off the police or any of his friends. He made the calls Joe told him to make. The money would be delivered in the morning after banking hours. So important was Marigold in the business world that his orders were not questioned.

When the phone calls were cleared Joe said, "Now back to the party for the marriage."

They walked into the living-room and Bess watched Joe walk across the room with her uncle. He had his hand shoved into one of his coat pockets. She knew he had a gun pressed into her uncle's side.

"The happy couple will be leaving a few moments after the ceremony. Sorry they can't wait for a big dinner," Joe said.

He was speaking to the friends who had come to see Bess married.

As she looked around the room Bess felt her heart sink. Joe had his gunmen spotted well. There was no chance for her to escape. She looked at the smirking Luggar who was showing off in his best phony-count manner. Within a few minutes she would be leaving, married to him.

Bess felt trapped, and knew there could now be no possible escape for her. No possible escape, that is, unless she arranged it herself. And she *could* arrange an escape, even now, if not for herself, then for her uncle. It was up to her to make a momentous decision, and make it quickly.

The justice cleared his throat preparatory to speech.

"I have signed the marriage papers," he said. "If you folks will stand up here before me I'll make this legal."

At that moment Bess made her decision. She didn't want to live if she had to be the wife of the killer facing her. She would not go with him. She would shout the truth so that her friends could save her uncle.

Joe seemed to sense her resolve. He scowled at

her. "Try anything and I'll drill you before you get a word out," he said in a low tone filled with cold resolve.

Bess looked him squarely in the eye. She meant to do just that and she meant to say as much as she could before he fired.

The Blue Streak and Hank turned toward the cabin with the elevator in it. The Blue Streak had a feeling he was being outwitted, perhaps defeated. Suddenly he bent down and picked up a bit of white cloth.

"This is Bess's handkerchief, I'm sure," he said sharply.

"How do you know?" Hank demanded of him quickly.

"I know the perfume she uses," the Blue Streak said. "Come on, Hank. They were in one of those cars."

"We can't run all the way to the city," Hank protested.

"My car may still be in the canyon. Luggar has been pretty busy. They think we are lost under the mountain. Hurry!" the Blue Streak explained quickly.

They set off at a run. Long before they reached the canyon the Blue Streak had heaved Hank across

his huge shoulders and was bounding along the deserted highway.

"She's there!" he shouted happily as he set Hank down.

"Don't know but what we'd make better time if you ran in," Hank said with a laugh.

He tested the motor and found the car had not been touched. He backed the torpedo around and sent it bouncing out of the canyon, once again heading for the city.

"Pay no attention to speed limits tonight," the Blue Streak ordered grimly. "There is not a moment to lose."

Hank chuckled. That was the way he liked to drive. They rounded corners on two wheels and roared down the short straightaways until they reached the highway.

On the smooth road Hank wound her up until the speedometer showed a little under a hundred miles per hour.

Twice police cruisers honked warningly at the speeding torpedo car and one of the cars tried desperately to give chase. They left the police car behind very soon.

"They'll be throwing a barricade across the road as soon as those boys can get to a phone!" Hank shouted. "That will certainly stop us. Any suggestions?"

"Have to take that chance!" the Blue Streak shouted back.

They would have to meet that contingency when it arose.

They swung around a bend and sighted the lane leading to the Marigold estate. They also sighted a truck and a police car backed across the road.

"Slow down!" the Blue Streak shouted. "Explain to the boys. Have them close in on the Marigold place!"

The brakes of the torpedo screamed and it swerved, then went into the ditch just before it smashed into the truck. The Blue Streak leaped free as the car rolled over. In one bound he cleared a hedge. As he looked back he saw Hank crawling out of the overturned car. He whirled and leaped away.

The sprint up the Marigold lane was the fastest of many fast runs the Blue Streak had made. As he darted across the grounds he saw the station wagon and the black sedan parked outside the front door of the big house. He hit the porch at one leap and crashed through the door. One immense bound took him straight into the brightly lighted living-room of the house.

As he entered he spotted Joe, and in the same instant he had the location of the other thugs. Joe had whirled and his usually dead-pan face showed

surprise. He went for his gun as the Blue Streak lunged at him. The gun came free and spat flame and lead, but it did not stop the flying figure lunging toward him.

The instant Luggar saw the uninvited guest he whirled to run away, but the Blue Streak caught him by the shoulder with one hand, while with the other he gripped Joe. Their heads came together with a dull thud. Three times the Blue Streak smashed their heads together, and when he released them they dropped to the floor limp and senseless. The other gunmen had seen enough. They had seen Joe's slugs fail to stop the masked man. They knew who he was, and all they wanted was to get away from there.

John Marigold was swinging a chair. He knocked one thug over and stood above him.

Mamie whirled upon Bess. Her little automatic was out now.

"You'll never live to crow about this!" she screamed.

The automatic steadied as she pointed it at Bess's heart.

In that instant the Blue Streak leaped. He caught Mamie's arm, and the twist he gave it sent the gun flying. Mamie screamed, this time in pain, as she struggled to get away.

Shots rang out beyond the door. The police were

closing in on the gangsters who were trying to get away.

The Blue Streak pulled Mamie quickly toward him.

"Where's Medusa?" he demanded.

"He's in his hideout where you'll never find him," Mamie answered defiantly.

"He's in his underground cavern," Bess said as she laid a hand on the Blue Streak's arm. "But get the police, don't go there alone. You have been so wonderful."

Her lips were trembling with happiness and excitement.

At that moment a police sergeant burst into the room.

"What's all this!" he called out. Then he saw the Blue Streak. "Oh, it's you. Guess you can explain if any one can."

"Mr. Marigold and Bess can explain. I have a personal score to settle with the mastermind of this ring."

"Better let me send a squad along," the sergeant said.

"Thanks, I'll not need them. Hank can trail me with a squad. Did any of them get away?" asked the Blue Streak.

"One red-headed gal and one feller," the sergeant said.

"In that case I'd better hurry," the Blue Streak said.

He whirled and leaped from the room.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A SCORE IS SETTLED

The Blue Streak reached his overturned speedster after cutting across the grounds and leaping two hedges. He caught hold of the car and heaved it back upon its wheels. It was battered but still intact.

He slid under the wheel and stepped on the starter. The engine coughed several times, then burst into a roar.

Spinning the wheel, he turned around in the road and roared past two astonished police officers. He checked his fuel indicator and switched on an auxiliary gas tank located behind the seat for just such emergencies as this.

Hank would have turned green with envy had he seen the way the Blue Streak sent the torpedo roaring along the highway. The roads were deserted, and he had no traffic worries. Several sleepy town marshals shouted after him, but none gave chase.

Swinging into the canyon road leading to Skeleton Mountains, he slowed his pace a bit but still held a reckless speed which took him careening around corners and swaying along the edge of yawn-

ing chasms. Only the Blue Streak could possibly execute such a feat.

Breaking out of the canyon he headed for the lodge. It seemed deserted. No lights showed in any windows.

Swinging around back of the main building he leaped from the torpedo and immediately charged toward the cabin housing the elevator to the cavern below.

The elevator in the cabin worked as it had before, but this time it seemed slower. The Blue Streak was so eager to close with Medusa he paced back and forth across the slowly moving cabin floor like a caged leopard.

Finally the elevator came to rest.

The Blue Streak leaped from it and charged toward the door in the tunnel wall. He hit it with his shoulder and strained against it. Slowly the massive block of stone slid back.

As he leaped through the opening he saw that no old man guarded the entrance as he had on the superdetective's previous descent.

Looking down a lighted and tiled passageway he saw Doctor Medusa standing staring at him. The doctor bent over and began to laugh, a mad, wild laugh.

The Blue Streak saw that he was bending over the plunger of a detonator, and knew that Medusa

had been warned of his coming. He had set a trap from which even the Blue Streak could not hope to escape.

"You have come!" Medusa called mockingly, his voice echoing down the passageway. "You will now be buried! When I push the plunger a thousand tons of rock will crash into the passageway and bury you!"

The Blue Streak's eyes darted from the detonator along two wires which ran up the wall and along it to a spot in the ceiling of the corridor. The wires entered a round hole in the ceiling. The Blue Streak judged the height of the ceiling to be a full eighteen feet.

"This time your superman powers will fail you. I will live to bring the girl and her uncle here. I am only sorry that you will be so badly crushed I will be unable to crystallize you for my collection!" Medusa laughed again.

The Blue Streak drew himself together, his leg muscles tensed. Suddenly he leaped into the air, reaching up toward the dangling wires. His fingers clutched at them, caught one of them and pulled it free as once again he landed lightly on his feet, facing Medusa.

"So, you would bury me," the Blue Streak called softly.

Medusa straightened and his dark face paled. A

wild light flamed in his eyes.

The Blue Streak charged forward with incredible speed.

For a second Medusa faced him, then he whirled and dived through a doorway.

The Blue Streak plunged through the opening after him. He saw Medusa leap upon a table and pick up a large retort of amber fluid. Raising the retort above his head he hurled it at the Blue Streak. The Blue Streak slid an arm upward and cradled the retort in it, easing its impact.

He saw that the amber liquid inside the huge jar was beginning to boil and swirl about. Instinctively he hurled it back at Medusa and ducked down behind a row of steel cabinets, seeking protection from the explosion he was sure would follow in this laboratory of the insane doctor.

The Blue Streak's action was none too quick. A blinding flash of light filled the room, followed by a jarring explosion. Parts of apparatus, glass fragments and pieces of wood showered down around the Blue Streak. The air was filled with acrid fumes. Slowly he raised his head and looked toward the table where Medusa had been standing. The table lay in a corner, shattered and twisted. Chairs were overturned and instruments lay scattered everywhere on the floor. Medusa had been hurled against a wall.

The Blue Streak stood looking at the wreck of the doctor's laboratory. Suddenly the doctor moved and began to pull himself up toward a cabinet set in the wall. The cabinet doors stood open, one of them sagging on its hinges. The Blue Streak saw two big knife switches inside the cabinets. As he stared at Medusa, amazed at the man's vitality, the doctor gripped one of the switches and pulled it. Instantly the Blue Streak felt the mountain above him tremble, then a dull roar filled the room, already shattered by one explosion.

Like a panther the Blue Streak leaped across the room and pulled Medusa away from the cabinet before he could shove the other switch into contact. Medusa's twisted face turned toward him. The man's eyes were blazing with madness and fury as he struggled to reach the switch that would completely destroy his underground world with its silent prisoners.

"You mean that you would actually blast this part of the cavern, too?" the Blue Streak asked grimly and unbelievably.

"I will! I will destroy everything," Medusa raved. His lips kept moving after he had spoken but no other words came. He slumped forward and the Blue Streak carried him across the room, to lay him on the floor.

At that moment blue-coated officers burst through

the doorway. Hank was leading them. Inspector Miller from police headquarters was beside Hank. He spoke curtly.

"Looks as though something blew up here," he said.

"Doctor Medusa tried to blow me up, Inspector," the Blue Streak said. "I'm sorry I couldn't keep him from destroying part of his cavern world. I'm sure you would have found it not only interesting but utterly fantastic."

"We have the whole story from Marigold and Miss Bess," the inspector said. "I guess you are the only man in the world who could possibly have saved their lives."

"Thanks, Inspector," the Blue Streak said. "I'm sure you can handle the rest of this case without any further assistance."

"Miss Bess and her uncle will arrive in a few minutes," the inspector said. "They want to see you before you leave."

The Blue Streak nodded to Hank.

As they stepped aside he said, "Time to bow out, Hank."

"Ain't you going to wait for that beautiful gal?"

"No, Hank, but perhaps we'll see Miss Marigold again some time, she is the type who is always getting into trouble."

Without another word they slipped down the

passageway and out of Medusa's underworld into the cool, clean mountain air.

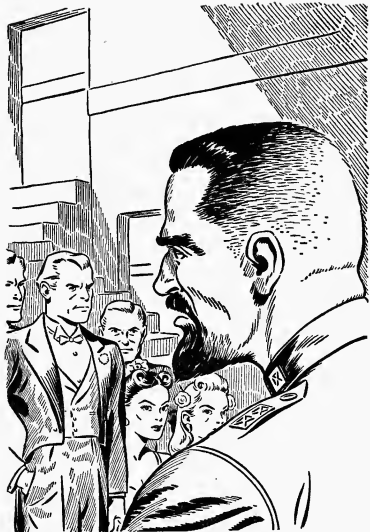
The Blue Streak once again had conquered the forces of evil with his extraordinary powers.



Marigold Offered to Hire The Blue Streak



Count Luggar Bowed Politely



His Black Eyes Stabbed Each Face



He Leaped Across the Chasm



Blue Streak Whirled and Charged



"Gosh, Boss, You Look Like a Dandy!"



The Huge Butler Groaned in Pain



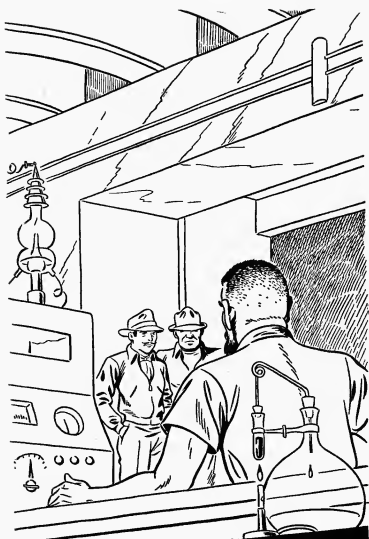
Medusa Pointed to His Statues



He Put the Bills on the Table



Medusa Held a Brief Conference



Dr. Medusa Told Midge and Luggar His Plans



He Saw Boot Marks on the Sand



He Battled His Way to the Edge



"Hang on Tight, Bess."



Medusa's Voice Was Crisp and Cold



Louie and Baby Face Taunted Luggar



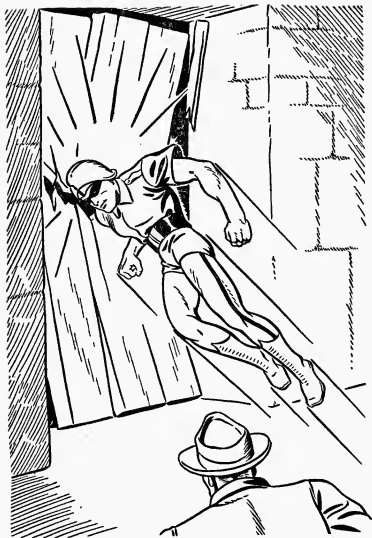
There Were Sounds Under the Floor



Bess Jabbed With Her Left



"May I See Uncle John?" Bess Asked



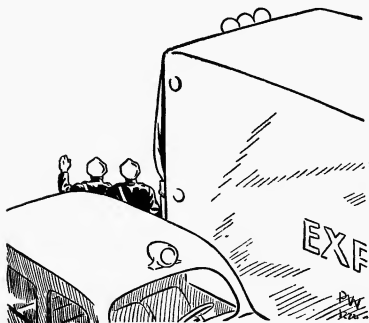
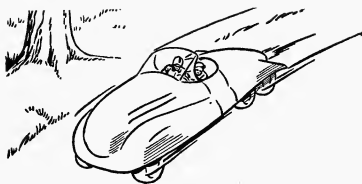
He Crouched and Hurled Himself Forward



"What's Your Game, Medusa?"



Hank Was Unable to Follow



"Slow Down," Blue Streak Shouted



Medusa Hurled the Retort at Him

